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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
MDES FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

by

ROSAN WAI YEE CHOW

A THESIS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

submitted by ROSAN WAI YEE CHOW in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design.





# **Design for Diverse Users, Complex Content and Volatile Context**

The Design of ESL Materials for Adult Immigrants

**Rosan Wai-Yee Chow**

**Visual Communication Design  
Thesis Project  
In Partial Completion of the  
Master of Design Degree**

**University of Alberta  
Edmonton, Alberta**

**Fall 1998**





## PREFACE

This thesis project is intended to explore how and what visual communication design could contribute to the development of instructional materials for adult immigrants learning English as a second language. The idea originated with a designer who had spent years producing graphic design products for commercial gains and who decided that it would be more fulfilling to design something which would be more socially relevant.

The project was guided by a user centered, content and context driven approach to identify design problems. It was discovered that some of the major problems for developing instructional materials for ESL adult immigrants are the diversity of the student body, the complexity of learning a language, and the volatility of the teaching and learning environment. There exists no single source that can be used by itself to serve the needs of any ESL class. As a result of that, a cut-paste-copy practice has been developed to 'produce' instructional materials to fill the gap. The problem of these makeshift materials is that they often lack visual appeal, continuity, and consistency. It seems that suitable content is available, but the organization and presentation of the information requires more careful planning. Hence a design proposal to increase the usability of the product is offered.





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Although many people have contributed their thoughts and insights, the designer has full responsibility for any and all errors and omissions.





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## INTRODUCTION

### *I Research Background*

#### **Personal interest**

My family has a rather long history of living in Canada. My great grandfather arrived here from China in 1896. He worked at a laundry shop in a small town in Alberta. He never learnt to speak English very well. When I was small, I heard stories about his long working hours and the lonely difficult life of being an immigrant in Canada. I could not picture what it was like not being able to communicate or to have only a handful of people to associate with. It was 100 years ago when my great-grandfather immigrated to Canada. Today I still see people around me, relatives and friends who share the immigrant life that he had: living in Canada but unable to speak the language and limiting themselves to their ethnocultural community – a place where they can be understood. I believe their limited command of English has a major impact on their well being. They become dependent in many ways and are isolated as individuals within their community and country. They are restricted in their pursuit of a productive life.

I moved to Canada with my parents when I was 18. My parents have been living here for 15 years and their English is extremely limited. My mother tried to learn English but failed. The reasons for her failure are multidimensional. She shared similar difficulties facing many other adult immigrants. I remember looking at her school book once. It was a cut, pasted and photocopied textbook. It was confusing and hard to follow. As a visual communication designer, I wondered if I could improve it. I felt that well designed instructional materials could make a difference in language learning.

#### **The Canadian context**

Historically, immigration has always been part of the country's policy to maintain population and economic growth. There are several distinctive immigration periods including early colonial settlement of French and English; Europeans moving from an industrializing Europe to a mainly agricultural Canada; a post World War II explosion of labourers for the burgeoning construction and manufacturing industries; and a later period with more educated urban immigrants destined for the metropolitan areas of Canada, including many who are investors and entrepreneurs. (EIC 1990) According to *Citizenship and Immigration Statistics 1994*, from 1861 to 1971, immigrants account for 10% of total population growth. Between 1981 and 1991, immigrants made up 30% of the population

◀ EIC: Employment and Immigration Canada, now Citizenship and Immigration Canada





growth. Between 1987 and 1993, the total number of immigrants per year has been increasing steadily, from 88,239 in 1987 to 255,819 in 1993. There was a slight drop in 1994 with 223,875. Unless radical policy changes occur at the federal level, immigration will remain a fact of life in Canada for many years to come.

A study prepared by Arther H. Akbari in March 1989 for the Policy Analysis Directorate of EIC shows that, overall, every immigrant group makes a positive contribution to the Treasury. And immigration is indicated to produce significant benefits through larger markets and economics of scale as well.

It is indicated in the report *Immigrant Integration and the Canadian Identity* (1990) produced by EIC, that traditionally immigrants to Canada came chiefly from Europe, mostly the UK, and from the U.S. – countries with racial and ethnic profiles similar to Canada. In the decade before the 1966 *White Paper on Immigration*, almost 90 per cent of the immigrants came from among the cultural 'relatives' of our founding peoples in Europe and the U.S. With the abandonment of preferred status for these areas in Canada's Immigration Act, the racial, ethnic and cultural character of our immigrants has changed. Between 1976 and 1986 well over 60 per cent of immigrants came from 'non-traditional' areas in Asia and the Third World. Therefore, Canada is becoming increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. In 1994, the top ten source countries of immigrants included Hong Kong (19.7%), the Philippines (8.5%), India (7.7%), China (5.6%), Taiwan (3.3%), Sri Lanka (3.0%), U.S.A. (2.8%), Vietnam (2.8%), Great Britain (2.7%) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (2.2%).

Integration of immigrants is considered extremely important to foster social stability and prosperity. Integration is "viewed as a bi-directional process involving accommodation and adjustment on the part of both migrants and the host society. It is distinguished from assimilation which implies the complete absorption of the migrant minority into the dominant culture or society. Integration happens to individuals as well as to societies and cultures. Integrated individuals are able to participate fully in all aspects of their societies. Integrated societies are characterized by agreed-upon values and are consequently able to function and evolve as complete units." (EIC 1990:1)

Although the issue of integration is very complex and language training alone will not ensure integration, many studies have indicated that language training is one of the most important issues directly affecting the integration of immigrants into the Canadian mosaic. "Through language training, immigrants should require fewer services assistance, mainstream agencies could assume a larger role with reduced overall costs. Language



training for immigrants is also a good investment because it provides the larger society with access to many of their skills which would otherwise not be fully employed. Canada already faces a shortage of skilled labour. Language training will assume even greater importance in the near future as more than 50 per cent of new labour-market entrants will be immigrants. The provision of effective and extensive language training to immigrants protects and strengthens Canada's official languages and removes important barriers to equality of opportunity. The integration of immigrants is enhanced and long-term ethnic harmony is promoted." (EIC 1990:5)

Adults account for most of the immigrant population. Between 1988 and 1994, 45% to 50% of the new immigrants landed were adults aged 20-44. In 1994, among the 223,875 landed immigrants, more than 50% of the total were between the ages of 20 and 44. Adults bring with them to Canada a wealth of experiences, knowledge, and expertise; lack of adequate language training for adult immigrants results in a loss to Canada as well as to immigrants of their potential, both economical and social. Language training for adult immigrants is vital for Canada.

## 2 Research Topic

### The 'real' issue and the design issue

The 'real' issue is immigrants have many settlement needs and language training is one of them. Breaking the language barrier plays an important role in helping them adapt to their new lives; even though language training should not be the only focus for adult immigrant education and language should not be seen as the only barrier separating immigrants from Canadian society. (Ho 1993) To provide language training to immigrants involves many levels of planning, in the report *Immigrants and Language Training (1991)* the EIC recommends a single federal authority to coordinate all federally-funded programs oriented towards settlement services for immigrants. Within each province, a single provincial authority to coordinate all provincial programs dealing with services for immigrants; and a joint federal-provincial committee struck to establish national standards for language training for immigrants. The issues cover teacher qualifications, language assessment and placement tests, curriculum development, special programs for professionals, highly skilled workers, those with literacy problems in their native language, duration of training and class size, and innovative approaches to teaching.

The design issue is to plan and create language instructions that are effective in helping immigrants to break down the language barrier which is one of the many obstacles facing them. Instructional design is to en-





sure the curriculum, method of teaching, lesson plan and instructional materials are most effective in providing the best quality of language instruction to adult immigrants. This research focuses on the development of instructional materials used within an instructor-based learning environment for beginning ESL adult immigrants. It is intended to identify and propose solutions to design problems that are hindering teaching and learning.

◀ ESL:  
*English as a Second Language*

### 3 The Role of Design

#### Visual Communication Design and Instructional Materials

"What is your thesis about?" was a question I was asked frequently. When I told my friends and acquaintances that I was designing instructional materials for beginning ESL adult immigrants, more often than not they would look puzzled. They apparently couldn't relate their ideas of visual communication design to the research I was working on. So, how does visual communication design relate to instructional materials?

In the traditional model, communication involves a transmitter and a receiver of the information. (Shannon & Weaver 1949) Communication by this definition is a one way act. It discounts the fact that the receiver can contribute to the process. It is more favourable and acceptable to say that the receiver is not passive but actively interprets the information presented. Communication is a two way process in which both the producer and the interpreter of the information interact. David Sless in *Vision Plus 4 - The Republic of Information* stated: "it does not seem (to me) to be useful to treat information as an already realised 'thing' which is somehow transported from place to place, mind to mind; it is more fruitful to see it as the name we give to some aspects of what is constructed through action, when people engage with each other and their environment." (Sless 1998:178)

◀ *Vision Plus 4 - The Republic of Information:  
An International Symposium on Design for  
Global Communication (1998)*

Communication is a means to an end. In the process of communication, information is produced either to inform, to persuade or to affect behavioural change. As Jorge Frascara suggests, "(in design) the purpose of collecting information about a given situation is to understand it so as to create objects, information or environments that will facilitate the realization of desired and desirable activities." (Frascara 1998:165)

For communication to be meaningful, the following elements are needed:

- 1 An intention.
- 2 Accurate information.
- 3 Information has to be accessible to the interpreter.
- 4 Information has to be understood by the interpreter.
- 5 Action has to be taken after information is processed.

4



Communication Design is the conception, planning and execution of the delivery of information. It is an intervention which makes the information accessible and understood with the intention of affecting knowledge, attitude or behaviour. It is a vehicle which can take visual, verbal and or physical form in any of several media: print, digital, or audio/visual.

Teaching and learning can be seen as communication acts in which information is exchanged. The teacher is the producer or messenger of information and the student is the interpreter and vice versa. How should the information be organized and presented to facilitate the teaching and learning process is a communication design problem. Instruction design is a branch of communication design.

"Instruction design is based upon some principles of human learning, specifically, the conditions under which learning occurs. Some time-tested principles of contiguity, repetition, and reinforcement indicate some of the conditions external to the learner that can be incorporated into instruction. A model of information processing that identifies a number of internal processes underlies contemporary theories of learning. These processes bring about several successive stages in the transformation of information on its way to storage in the long-term memory. The purpose of instruction is to arrange external events that support these internal learning processes." (Gagné et al. 1992:18)

There are nine stages of instruction design: (Gagné et al. 1992:22)

- 1 Identify instructional goals
- 2 Conduct instructional analysis
- 3 Identify entry behaviors, characteristics
- 4 Write performance objectives
- 5 Develop criterion referenced test items
- 6 Develop instructional strategy
- 7 Develop and select instructional materials
- 8 Design and conduct formative evaluation
- 9 Design and conduct summative evaluation

Development and selection of instructional materials are vital parts of the instruction design system. Instruction designers either develop or select instructional materials as part of the instruction design effort. Instructional materials can be both print and non print. Teachers normally only select and utilize ready-made materials that they integrate into their lesson plans.

The design of instructional materials for beginning ESL adult immigrants involves curriculum and interface design. The appropriate curriculum makes the instructional materials useful. The appropriate interface de-



sign makes the product usable – accessible and comprehensible. Interface design includes the physical and the visual and this is where visual communication design can make a contribution. Well designed instructional materials maximize their effectiveness in aiding the communication act, making visual communication design a positive intervention in the teaching and learning process.

#### **4 Research Approach**

##### **User centered, Content and Context Driven Approach**

The designer has chosen a user centered, content and context driven approach to tackle the design problem. Communication is contextual and user based. Any design problem is made complex and unique because of the particular user, content and context. Any design solution is a response to the particulars. The designer believes that without knowing who the user is, what the content is and in which context the product is used, design will remain at the level of uninformed intuition. The designer, through literature review and field work, identified design problems related to the diverse users, the complexity of teaching and learning a language and the volatility of the teaching and learning environment. She then proposed a design solution to minimize those problems based on the understanding of the issues at hand.

#### **5 Research Objectives**

##### **Going beyond ...**

There are two main objectives for this research. On the one hand, the designer aims to propose a design solution to the development of instructional materials for beginning ESL adult immigrants. The focus is on usability: how the information is organized and presented to increase accessibility and comprehensibility so that it can be used to its greatest potential.

On the other hand, by developing the instructional materials, the designer hopes to demonstrate how research in finding problems and reducing them can be initiated and undertaken by a user centered, content and context driven design approach. The research can then stand as an exemplar for solving similar design problems.





In order to understand the user, the content and the context, the designer started by reviewing literature on language learning, adult second language learning, current approaches to teaching ESL and characteristics of ESL adult immigrants to have a general concept of the issue at hand. The designer then observed ESL classes in Edmonton, Alberta; pretested a sample of instructional materials and interviewed an ESL insider. The field work let the designer gain first hand understanding on both the users and the context. The designer also evaluated existing ESL materials to identify problems that may interfere with teaching and learning ESL. The research findings guided the development of design criteria and led to a design proposal.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### / Language Learning

**a** Three positions: behaviourist, innatist and interactionist

The behaviourists such as Skinner (1957) and Watson (1924) believe that first language acquisition is simply a matter of imitation and habit formation. Behaviourists search for observable environmental conditions (stimuli) that co-occur and predict specific verbal behaviours (responses). What the behaviourists reject are internal structures or processes with no specific physical correlate, such as grammars. Behaviourists focus on the functions of language, the stimuli that evoke verbal behaviour and the consequences of language performance. Behaviourists also focus on learning because they regard language as a skill, not essentially different from any other behaviour. Speaking and understanding must be brought under the control of stimuli in the environment by imitation, reinforcement, and successive approximations of mature performance (sometimes known as shaping). Classical conditioning is used to account for the interrelationship of words and word meanings. Operant conditioning is used to explain productive speech. All behaviouristic accounts of language acquisition assume that productive speech is shaped by differential reinforcement and punishment supplied by environmental agents. Behaviourists assume that the course of language development is largely determined by the course of training, not maturation. (Gleason 1997)

The innatists such as Chomsky (1982) and Lenneberg (1967) attribute the ability to overcome the complexities of language to innate endowments. They assume that language has a structure or grammar that is somewhat independent of language use. A grammar is a finite set of rules;

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGN:

- To master a language takes lots of repetitive practice (in meaningful contexts).

- This theory does not seem to provide opportunity for design intervention.



shared by all the speakers of a language, it allows the generation of an infinite set of permissible sentences. Thus one of the most important tasks confronting the language learner is how to derive meaning from the ambiguous surface structure exemplars provided in the language environment. They argue that language is innate in humans. The innate language component has been defined as a language acquisition device, or LAD that has a host of information about grammatical classes, deep phrase structure, and possible transformations. The LAD is assumed to be a physiological part of the brain that is a specialized language processor. This approach insists that the environment merely triggers the maturation of a physiologically based language system (LAD), or sets certain parameters, but does not shape or train language behaviour. (Gleason 1997)

The interactionists such as Vygotsky (1962) and Jean Piaget (1954) believe that the complex interplay between a language learner and his/her environment helps language development. Interactionists, as the name implies, assume that many factors (e.g. social, linguistic, maturational/biological, cognitive, etc) affect the course of development, and that these factors are mutually dependent upon, interact with, and modify one another. Not only may cognitive or social factors modify language acquisition, but language acquisition will in turn modify the development of cognitive and social skills. Thus, not only are these variables interactive, the causal relationships among them are reciprocal. The social interactionist believes that the structure of human language may have arisen out of the social-communicative functions language plays in human relations. The functions of language in social communication are considered to be central.

One of the most recent cognitive approaches to language learning is derived from the information processing paradigm. This paradigm experiments on human memory, perception, and problem solving. In essence, the human information processing system encodes stimuli from the environment, interprets those stimuli, stores in memory stimulus representations and allows information retrieval. More recent cognitive approaches assume that parallel processing underlies language. In parallel processing, networks of processors are connected so that several operations or decisions may proceed concurrently. These networks have come to be called parallel distributed processors, or PDPs. (Gleason 1997)

• *Knowing a language is using a language.*

• *Possible approach to research on how image and words can affect learning a second language.*



## **b** Differences between first and second language learning

Researches have shown that first and second language learners of a particular language go through similar developmental process. And the knowledge of the first language will affect the learning of a second language. (Lightbown and Spada 1993)

From the behaviourist point of view, language is a matter of habit formation, so that old habits gained from the knowledge of first language interfere with learning a second language. In order to learn a second language, new habits have to be formed. The innatist hypothesis is that because of the innate ability, we will be able to fit the knowledge of the second language into the existing structure through restructuring. The interactionist belief is that the input the learner receives is fundamental to acquiring a second language. They see the interaction between the native speaker and the learner as pertinent to second language development.

• Opportunity to use the language is significant.

## **c** Linguistic and social perspectives on second language learning

Derived from the learning theories, the linguistic and social perspectives look at language learning with two equally important but different focuses. These two aspects are fundamental to second language acquisition. "On the one hand, the process of acquiring a language, be it first or second, is clearly a linguistic phenomenon which involves taking on vocabulary, grammatical functions, pronunciation, and to some extent an altered or at least influenced view of the world. On the other hand, the acquisition of a language involves a social adjustment on the part of the individual. Languages are acquired in order to facilitate communication, either active or passive, with some cultural community." (Gardner 1985:125)

• Implications for design are based on the perspective taken.

### *The linguistic perspective*

The linguistic perspective focuses on the individual, directs "attention to the hypothesized processes operating on the individual when confronted with the task of learning or using a particular language form." (Gardner 1985:124) There are three models which can be put under this category: the monitor model by Krashen, (1978, 1981, 1982); the conscious reinforcement model by Carroll (1981); and the strategy model by Bialystok (1978).





### The monitor model

Krashen claims that there are two independent language systems, one conscious and the other subconscious. Adult second language learners have two modes of language learning, which he had labelled acquisition and learning. "Acquisition is characterized as subconscious and dependent on interaction with primary linguistic data; whereas learning is conscious and dependent on rule isolation and feedback." (Krashen 1981) In other words, language acquisition is a subconscious process that results from active use of the language, whereas language learning is a conscious process of rule learning. Studies by Carroll (1967) and Naiman, Fröhlich and Stern (1975) suggested that the good language learner employs both methods and mixes formal and informal experience with the second language.

### The conscious reinforcement model

Carroll views language acquisition as a very complex decision-making process where the individual searches for appropriate responses in order to communicate, and those that achieve the goals are acquired and subsequently automatized. (Gardner 1985)

### The strategy model

Bialystok claims that individual differences in acquisition are explained primarily in terms of the efficiency with which the model operates for the individual. Language output is largely mediated by implicit linguistic knowledge/intuitive automatic knowledge of the language which is the system underlying most language behaviour. She also suggests that different language tasks involve different processes and strategies. (Gardner 1985)

### *The social perspective*

#### The social psychological model

"Lambert sees 'linguistic distinctiveness is a basic component of personal identity...' (Lambert 1974). Learning a second language involves the development of proficiency in that language with no pressure to replace or reduce the importance of the first language." (Gardner 1985:132)

### The acculturation model

Schumann concerns himself solely with identifying the major causal variables underlying 'natural' second language acquisition. His proposition is similar to Lambert's position (1963b; 1967; 1974) which assumes that a primary requirement of second language acquisition is identifica-



tion with the other community. It differs, however, in that it considers social and affective factors are the major causal ones in second language acquisition. (Gardner 1985)

#### The social context model

Clément places considerable emphasis on the cultural milieu and the relative vitality of the language communities involved. He assumes that second language acquisition includes not only the learning of language skills but also the adoption of other patterns of behaviour of the second language community. The central concept in the model is motivation, which is seen to consist of two possible processes: integrativeness, and fear of assimilation. In this way the social context is seen as an important factor in the language learning context. (Gardner 1985)

◀ *Integrativeness: Integrative motives are those which stress the value of being part of a language community or culture. (Gardner 1985)*

#### The intergroup model

Giles and Byrne focus on the acquisition of a second language by members of a linguistic minority group. The central concept underlying this model is the self-concept, and the major motivating force is one of developing or maintaining a positive self-image. In this theory social identity refers to an individual's self-knowledge in terms of his or her group memberships. In terms of the theory, whenever the results of such social comparisons result in a negative self-concept, individuals will adopt a number of strategies in order to change the evaluation. They propose that motivation is central to second language acquisition and that the integrative motive is the strongest form of motivation. (Gardner 1985)

#### d The shift from linguistic to communicative focus

Since the 1980s, the functional and social aspect of knowing a language has been favoured by theorists and practitioners in language teaching. Learning a language means knowing a language and using a language. Any form of language, oral, written or sign is a means to achieve an end – to communicate to serve the following functions: (Wallace 1986)

• *The communicative instead of the linguistic focus should guide the development of design criteria.*

- 1 to achieve wants and needs
- 2 to express a growing personal identity
- 3 to make jokes and plays on words
- 4 to exchange information

Language is therefore contextual and it is always used in a social and cultural setting. It is argued that the language of the individual develops in relation to the person's function in social and family life. Language learning and development emerge from the dynamic interaction of social and individual factors.

11



## e Second language learning for adults

### Age

Common observations show that adults are very capable of learning a second language, often very well, but children are the ones who acquire a second language with ease, develop native-like proficiency, and eventually attain the language. Age is often considered a determining factor for acquiring a second language.

Long term empirical studies (Garcia 1969; Krashen 1975; Oyama 1976; Patkowski 1980) have shown that over the long run, those who begin a second language during childhood achieve higher levels of linguistic competence.

Studies by Oyama (1976, 1978) show also that the association between performance on the comprehension task and age of beginning the second language is robust and clear.

A study by Asher & Gardner (1969) concludes that there is a correlation between age and pronunciation fidelity of a second language in children, the reason for which is not clearly identified. And although adults can improve on their pronunciation, there are limits to the degree of perfection that may be expected in general from second language adult learners.

Patkowski (1980) found that age of acquisition is a very important factor in setting limits on the development of native-like mastery of a second language and that this limitation does not apply only to accent. A sensitive period is argued to exist for the eventual attainment of native-like language.

No one can explain why there is a sensitive period, whether maturational, physiological, or environmental, but there is general consensus that from age 2 to puberty there is a much higher probability of acquiring a native-like language. But short term studies have shown that adults are generally faster than children in early stages of second language learning. (Olson & Samuels 1973; Asher & Price 1967; Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle 1977, 1978) Adults tend to surpass children in learning a language in pronunciation, syntax, and morphology. Studies have also found that although children outperform adults in acquiring phonological aspect of language, adults do much better than children in the learning of syntax and semantics.

### Motivation

It is generally believed that the more motivated the learner, the better they learn. When speaking of motivation and second language learning, Gardner (1985:50) concludes that motivation is often seen as an important element for second language learning. He suggests that motivation

• Age is only relevant as an indicator for developing appropriate design.

• The materials have to be motivating – relevant to the learners' lives.





"involves four aspects, a goal, effort, behaviour, and a desire to attain the goal and favourable attitudes toward the activity in question." He identifies two types of motives, namely integrative and instrumental. Integrative motives are those which stress the value of being part of a language community or culture, and instrumental motives are more concerned with economic and practical advantages of knowing the language. Studies have demonstrated that learners who indicated integrative motives among their reasons for learning a second language were more effortful and had higher motivational intensity (Gardner and Lambert 1959, Gordon 1980). Motivation is important because it determines the extent to which learners will be actively involved in the learning of the second language. This suggestion is also supported by research on the relation of motivation and persistence by Bartley (1969, 1970), Mueller and Harris (1966), Clément *et al.* (1978). Studies on motivation and classroom behaviour conducted by Glikzman (1976), Glikzman *et al.* (1982), and Naiman *et al.* (1978) also support Gardner's hypothesis.

Other factors that may affect learning:

Individual differences in aptitude, intelligence, personality, knowledge of the world and learning styles have been shown by some studies to have an effect on second language learning.

• These factors are only relevant as indicators for developing appropriate designs.

Aptitude: according to Krashen (1981:105), individuals who possess the following foreign language aptitude will succeed in learning.

- *phonetic coding ability* – an ability to identify distinct sounds, to form associations between those sounds and symbols representing them, and to retain these associations.
- *grammatical sensitivity* – the ability to recognize the grammatical functions of words or other linguistic entities in sentence structures.
- *rote learning ability for foreign language materials* – the ability to learn associations between sounds and meaning rapidly and efficiently and to retain these associations.
- *inductive language learning ability* – the ability to infer or induce the rules governing a set of language materials given samples of language materials that permit such inferences.

Intelligence: some studies have shown that learners with higher intelligence perform better in conventional classroom exercises. But some argue that to view intelligence as merely an original equipment is to reject education and the notion of teaching and learning.



Personality: some studies show that being extroverted seems to help learning oral language. Many studies have been done on the relationship between personality and second language learning but different studies have shown different results.

Knowledge of the world: learning is based on what the learner already knows. The experiences that the learners bring to learning will affect the way they learn.

Learning styles: for Keefe and Languis (1988:5) "learning style is the composite of characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment. It is demonstrated in that pattern of behaviour and performance by which an individual approaches educational experiences. Its basis lies in the structure of neural organization and personality which both molds and is molded by human development and the learning experiences of home, school, and society."

#### *f* Reflecting on theories – a first person perspective

Before I came to live in Canada at the age of 18, I had been studying English as a foreign language for 13 years in school in Hong Kong. But in the first few months of living in Canada, I communicated with Canadians with tremendous difficulties. I could read better than I could understand orally and I could write better than I could speak. However, my communicative ability was very minimal. All the years of learning English in Hong Kong seemed totally useless.

After many years of using English in Canada now I am able to communicate effectively though I never obtained native-like proficiency. So what happened? What contributed to the differences?

It seems to me that using a language really is the best way to learn it. For 13 years in Hong Kong I learnt English by rules. I did book after book of exercises but this didn't get me very far in terms of communicative ability. But a few years in Canada actively using the language did. When I was learning English in Hong Kong, I was only playing with symbols and trying to put these symbols together. These symbols had no meaning to me because I did not use them to achieve anything. It was like learning to cook by doing exercises, but never actually doing it, not even tasting the food after it is cooked, let alone eating it.

In my opinion, using the language requires frequent encounters with the language and learning it through trial and error. It takes lots of practice, not in books, but in meaningful contexts. My experience tell me



both conscious learning and subconscious acquisition through frequent exposure are equally important. Rule learning helps to understand and explain how the language works. But the rules have to be applied to be taken in.

I agree that motivation is the most important aspect of learning the language. Learning a language is hard work; in order for a person to make the effort, (s)he has to be motivated. For myself I was quite motivated for two particular reasons. Firstly, I wanted to go to university and I had to pass the TOEFL exam (the instrumental motive). I felt that I needed to overcome the language barrier to open other doors. Secondly, I had a positive image of Canadian culture and ways of life, (the integrative motive). I found the people and the things around me different and interesting and I liked to learn more about them. So I often tried to find opportunities to immerse myself in the culture and I believe my involvement provided me with opportunities to practise the language.

I think age can be a problem for immigrants to learn the language, not in terms of biological determinism, but more due to the obligations and restrictions that come with being an adult. I was 18 and still in high school when I came to Canada, and that put me in an English speaking environment. Unlike me, many adult immigrants have financial obligations and they have to work. With no English, they can only get jobs that don't require English and thus provide no opportunity to use it. It is a vicious cycle.

I believe personality plays a part in learning English. Not so much due to shyness and anxiety and their effects on learning in the classroom; but more due to cultural barriers. Personality is related to culture. Chinese culture favours and produces people with personality traits such as strict, obedient, submissive, reserved and indirect. These personality traits may clash with the Canadians'. Culture barriers hinder learning the language and language barriers hinder understanding the culture. Unable to identify with the culture, immigrants will have no interest or willingness to learn the language.

◀ TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language



## 2 Current situations in ESL Education

### α Current approaches to teaching ESL to adult immigrants

As far as second language teaching and learning is concerned, there are significant shifts that have taken place recently, resulting from studies in applied linguistics, anthropology, and cognitive science. These shifts include a greater emphasis on communication and 'meaning making' and consideration of the ways language is used in various social contexts. This focus promotes second language acquisition as a process of meaning making that links the experience of the learner to culture, language, literacy, and learning. (Wrigley 1993) Adult education is considered most effective when it is relevant to the students' lives, based on their experiences and involving them. (Auerbach 1992)

Deriving from these focuses are three approaches which are currently employed in teaching ESL to adult immigrants, namely the Whole Language, the Learner-Centered, and the Participatory. (Huerta-Macias 1993)

#### The Whole Language approach

Whole language practitioners believe that language is a social process that is learned as we interact within a given context. The active role played by the student is important because students bring valuable knowledge to the classroom. This knowledge should be respected and built upon; form should follow function in language development and not vice versa. Therefore, in the whole language classroom, language is taught in a real and natural context, and it is believed that, in this way, language learning is easier and more interesting and relevant to the learner.

#### The Learner-Centered approach

A learner-centered approach, also referred to as a student-centered or worker-centered approach, focuses on learners' real life needs. Through ongoing dialogue between teachers and learners, the content of the curriculum and the learning objectives are determined. Learners are responsible for setting personal and realistic goals and determining the steps toward achieving those goals. What is also aimed for is the highest level of participation, in which learners have considerable control and responsibility for classroom activities. In the learner-centered approach, students progress and reflect on their learning, while content and goals may be modified to suit their needs.





### The Participatory approach

The participatory approach was popularized by the work of Paulo Freire. A participatory approach not only develops a language program which is meaningful to learners, but also extends language learning into action that will better the learners' lives. The participatory approach goes beyond a learner-centered approach because it advocates language development as a vehicle for personal transformation and social change. Learners discuss issues in class that are significant to them and determine ways of dealing with these issues in real life. Learners are seen as agents for change, and for bettering their lives and the lives of those close to them.

In sum, the Whole Language approach emphasizes function over form; the Learner-Centered approach is concerned with collaborative decision-making about the curriculum; and the Participatory approach focuses on language development as a vehicle for personal and social change. In reality, these three approaches often overlap.

• The involvement of students is vital.

### **b** The Canadian scene

#### The LINC program

As a result of the 1991-1995 Immigration Plan, a language training programme – Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) for immigrants was established. According to EIC, “the objective of LINC is to provide basic language training to adult newcomers in one of Canada’s official languages. LINC will facilitate the social, cultural and economic integration of immigrants and refugees into Canada so they may become participating members of Canadian society as soon as possible. The intent of the program is to include orientation to Canada material.” (EIC 1993:1)

The LINC programmes are provided free of charge to all refugees and immigrants provided that their existing English skills do not exceed basic level. The length of training is based on individual progress and the extent of identified needs. In addition, all businesses, non-profit groups, non-governmental organizations, community groups, educational institutions, individuals, and provincial, territorial or municipal governments are able to apply for funding from EIC to run the LINC program. The funding may be signed for a period of up to twelve months.



Canadian Language Benchmarks:

*The Canadian Language Benchmarks: English as a Second Language for Adults* were established in 1996. It is “a task-based descriptive scale of language proficiency in English as a second language, expressed in terms of communicative competence as twelve benchmarks.” (CIC 1996:1) It provides the curriculum developers, materials developers, teachers and learners with general proficiency guidelines. “Basic proficiency is described as a range of abilities to communicate in predictable contexts and within the area of basic needs, everyday common activities, and familiar topics of immediate personal relevance.” (CIC 1996:1) The goal of beginning ESL learners is identified as the achievement of basic proficiency in English.

◀ CIC:  
Citizenship and Immigration Canada,  
formerly Employment and  
Immigration Canada

### 3 Characteristics of ESL Adult Immigrants

#### a Full of life experiences

Adult educators often claim the best way of teaching adults is to involve them. A study on ESL programs in the U.S. by Aguirre International in 1991 has recognized that ESL learners despite being classified as limited English proficient, bring a wealth of experience and background knowledge to the classroom. Teachers in the Aguirre study reported that their experiences and knowledge allow learners to handle successfully the language and literacy demands of their everyday lives: securing housing, enrolling their children in school, building strong families, accessing social services, and finding jobs.

• Involvement of students is vital.

#### b Have multiple obligations

Besides going to ESL classes, most of the adult learners have to work, or have family and other responsibilities. (Ho 1990 and Laberge 1992) This implies that they may often experience fatigue, cannot concentrate and miss classes. (Bell & Love 1984)

• The volume of materials needs to be broken down into manageable units.  
• Frequent review is needed.

#### c Have specific interests and goals.

Most students are very particular about what they want from their learning and they are very goal oriented. This means if the class is not providing the materials that they think are making a difference, they are not going to be very motivated to learn.

• The content of materials has to be relevant to the students' lives.

#### d From diverse cultural and educational backgrounds

In every ESL class learners come from all over the world and from all walks of life. They are culturally and educationally diverse. McGroarty (1993) points out that “for many learners, the ESL classroom serves the

• Materials have to be flexible.



crucial function of cultural as well as linguistic orientation and understanding of the cultural factors that shape the actual processes of classroom instruction.” She recognizes that learners may have very different perspectives on issues such as the roles of teachers and students, gender, and expected behaviours. Cultural as well as personal sensitivity has to be exercised when introducing topics and lessons that may be distasteful or difficult.

Culturally framed learning styles and personalities vary. Asian learning styles are different from the western ones. Asian learners tend to use rote memorization, and learn from books – they are more visually oriented, more passive and less interactive. These particular styles need to be addressed.

e May have physical and psychological constraints

Some learners may carry with them a load of emotions to the classroom, some of them may have experienced war and tortures, some may have lost their families, some have lost their professions, some find going to school embarrassing and some are hoping to sponsor their family back home. (Ho 1993, Laberge 1992) “The counsellor, teacher, coworker, boss and community members must ‘know’ the immigrant. There must be recognition and discussion of their situation so that they feel accepted and acknowledged for who they are.” (Laberge 1993:68) Sensitivity is once again called for. Besides psychological difficulties, some of them may have physical problems such as not being able to see or hear very well.

• *Materials have to be comfortable to use.*





## FIELD WORK

### I Observations of a Beginning ESL Class

#### a Method

A LINC I class at the Millwoods Multi-Purpose Language Centre was observed for six periods of two hours each. The objective for observing the class was to find out how instructional materials are used in a genuine ESL classroom by the instructor and the students. The designer borrowed the Descriptive Question Matrix from James P. Spradley's *Participant Observation* to guide the observations:

- 1 What are the IM? (object/object)
- 2 Where are the IM located? (object/space)
- 3 What are all the ways IM are used by the instructors and students? (object/actor)
- 4 What are all the ways IM are used in act, activities and events? (object/act, activity, event)
- 5 How are IM used at different times? (object/time)
- 6 How are IM used in seeking goals? (object/goal)
- 7 What are all the ways IM evoke feelings? (object/feelings)

◀ IM: Instructional Materials

#### b Summary of observations

Millwoods Multi-Purpose Language Centre is a joint center with programs offered by the Alberta Vocational College, the Mennonite Centre and the Indo Canadian Women's Association. The language programs are funded by CIC. Students do not pay for tuition as long as they are landed immigrants or refugees. The centre is located in an office tower inside of Millbourne Mall.

This class is for LINC I which is the lowest level within the Language Instruction for New Comers program. There are eight adult students: six women and two men. Two of the students are from Hong Kong, one from Ethiopia, one from El Salvador, three from India and one from Bosnia. They study full time and come to school from 9:00am to 3:00pm Monday to Friday.

The classroom, although small, is well lit and comfortable. The students sit around the tables which are arranged in a U-shape and the instructor sits at the open end of the U. Everyone is able to see almost everyone else from where he or she sits. There is a white board on one side of the wall facing the students. The instructor and the students seem very friendly and they also appear fairly comfortable with each other.



After the first three days of in-class observations, the following observations were made: (see appendix 1)

- 1 *The IM used in this class were not particularly user-friendly. (object/object)*
  - Overall there was not enough room for students to write down notes.
  - Information was not always organized or presented in a clear manner and that could cause confusion. For example, the placement and typographic treatment of the title and body text lack consistency. (see appendix 2)
- 2 *The IM were always placed in front of the students, ready to be used during the whole class. (object/space)*
- 3 *Although the instructor used body language and drawings to assist his task, his teaching was mostly based on the IM. (object/actor)*
- 4 *When the instructor used the IM, the students would have no choice but to follow. They were the central object that the instructor and students touched, looked at, read from, wrote on. They were the instruments through which the teacher taught and the students learnt. (object/act/activity/event)*
- 5 *The ways the IM were used depended on the activities rather than on time. (object/time)*
- 6 *If the goal of the class was to learn English, in achieving that goal students had to use the IM provided to them. (object/goal)*
- 7 *The students and the instructor did not seem to have any problems, at least did not have the complaints that I had when using the IM. (object/feelings)*

## 2 Pretesting Instructional Materials

### a Design of the pretest materials

Based on the observations of the class, the designer re-designed one of the existing packages (see appendix 2) that the class was going to use for the following week. This pretest package (see appendix 3) was just one of the many IM used in many ESL classes, the test was not to pinpoint what could be improved for that package, but rather to test some of the questions regarding the usability of IM.

- 1 *Since most students would write something on the IM at some point, an area was added at the bottom of each sheet.*
- 2 *Based on the size of handwriting of most students, three eighths of an inch was found to be big enough for them to write. If the height and the length of the writing space was not in proportion with a normal English sentence, some students tended to write the letters too big to fit*

21



*the sentence nicely within the space given.*

- 3 *Organized information should be easier to absorb, and graphics can be used as organizers, so the following was implemented:*
  - *Some of the more important words for students to learn were underlined.*
  - *All the key phrases were separated and put on one side because that would make them stand out and students should pay more attention to them.*
  - *Each repetitive phrase was grouped in a unit and that should reduce the perceived volume of the learning task.*
- 4 *Each page was divided into two columns to visually reinforce the idea it was dialogue.*
- 5 *All the information not related to the content was put in small Italics at the bottom, and it appeared totally different from the content information so as not to distract the students.*

**b Summary of observations (see appendix 4)**

- 1 *The students did not choose to write in the designated space. They were instructed to do so; their reasons for not using this particular feature had to be found out from the students.*
- 2 *Three eighths of an inch is a good height for students to write comfortably. If being neat and tidy is a virtue, then a lined space is better than an empty space.*
- 3 *Language is a complex system, much more complex than the map of the London subways. It should be helpful for the students if they receive information which is not only organized in content but also in presentation.*
- 4 *Graphics may be used as organizers and organized information may be easier to absorb; however, if the instructor does not make use of the design, it won't make any difference to the students. It cannot be stressed enough that in the end it is the instructor who chooses to use or not use the IM. If instructors don't like using the IM, it is a waste of effort and resources. More research has to be done to find out from the instructors their reasons for using or not using IM and how they are most likely to use them.*
- 5 *The intention of the design may need to be made explicit to the instructors and the students, so they can be convinced to use the IM.*



### 3 An Interview with an Insider

An interview was conducted with Dr. Laura Ho, the Director of the Millwoods Welcome Centre for Immigrants in Edmonton. Millwoods Welcome Centre for Immigrants provides services to immigrants in the area of education, employment and settlement. Dr. Ho received her PhD in Education in 1993 at the University of Alberta. Her research focused on the experiences of immigrants in adult education. She has taught ESL in Canada and overseas for many years since the late 70s. She has directed an ESL resource centre in Edmonton. She is also an active member of TESOL Canada. The interview took a look from the insider point of view to gain more insight on the profiles of the users and local situation.

◀ TESOL:  
Teaching English to Speakers  
of Other Languages

#### a Design of the questions

Using the method suggested by MacCracken in *The Long Interview*, questions below were asked in this particular order during the interview:

- 1 In terms of educational background, what is the profile of the beginning ESL learners?
- 2 Are they any different from those Canadian adult students returning to school to complete a high school diploma?
- 3 What are the three most difficult tasks they face when learning English as a second language?
- 4 What kind of instructional materials do instructors use? Are they commercially prepared or tailor made?
- 5 Can instructors choose to use other than what is provided to them?
- 6 If the instructors can choose to use or not use the IM, what are the reasons for their choices? (If the reason is because there is no suitable IM, then comes the question why not?)
- 7 How do instructors put together instructional materials?
- 8 If the instructors are free to create IM, is there any problem concerning quality and control?
- 9 If students only receive bits and pieces of information as their only learning materials, how will that affect their learning?
- 10 What do you think are the three most important criteria for designing IM?
- 11 If motivation is a positive factor in learning, how can we develop instructional materials that can motivate students?
- 12 If fun is a motivation for learning, how can we make the IM fun? Much of the ESL literature suggests using teaching aids like real-life books, magazines, relics, posters, wall charts to make a class more interesting. Are they being used? (Why not?)





- 13 *I have come across an activity book 'The ESL Toolbox' published by the University Extension Press at the University of Saskatchewan. It is full of ideas, pictures, games and it is made for reproduction for educational use. How fully is it being used?*
- 14 *Do you think the students can handle computers as IM?*
- 15 *Is there a budget for technology investment?*

**b** *Summary of the interview (see appendix 5):*

- 1 *Beginning ESL students have diverse educational and cultural backgrounds.*
- 2 *Culturally framed learning styles and visual perception can be barriers for learning English.*
- 3 *Finding a motivation to learn English is one of the biggest problems the students face.*
- 4 *Students can only be integratively motivated when they are connected to Canadians in genuine social settings where they need to use English. Language remains an abstraction until it is used.*
- 5 *Due to the uniqueness of each ESL class, there exists no textbook which is suitable for all. Cutting and pasting is the norm for producing ESL instructional materials.*
- 6 *The problems caused by the cut and paste materials are a lack of continuity, consistency and review.*
- 7 *The instructional materials should be relevant to the students' lives. Secondly, they should cover the language skills that need to be taught. Finally, the materials should involve the students.*
- 8 *Learning a language is hard work. All the past tense, past participle, and vocabulary need to be memorized.*
- 9 *'Real life' materials can only be effective when used in a thoughtful and directed way.*
- 10 *The physical size of the instructional materials can prevent their use.*
- 11 *Although computer-based instructional materials have potential, the cost hampers their development.*



#### **4A Look at Commercially Prepared Instructional Materials**

There are abundant resources available for adult learning ESL, such as textbooks, grammar books, picture dictionaries, books for comprehension, audio-visuels, games, etc. However, the majority of them are marketed towards post-secondary foreign learners. There are very limited materials geared toward adult immigrants. There are even fewer for beginning learners. Among the handful of textbooks which are suitable; not a single one can be used just by itself because the topics and the levels may not match the diverse interests and needs of any ESL class for adult immigrants.

Therefore, most ESL providers or instructors put together their own materials. Some of them create their own from scratch; for example, the ESL class which was observed was using materials made by the institution. Although the content of the materials is well conceived, little attention is paid to the interface design. Information can be better organized and presented to increase usability.

For those instructors who don't have custom-made materials to use, most of the time, they cut, paste and copy various materials to suit the needs of individual classes. So the materials can consist of a copy of an article from one book, a copy of picture from another, and a copy of grammar exercises from yet another, etc... These materials do not present information effectively and sometimes the visual quality is so bad that they are even hard to read.



## IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Through literature review and field work, implications for design are drawn from the research findings on the user (adult immigrant learners), the content (language learning) and the context (the conditions in which the instructional materials are used).

### 1 The User

#### a Diverse

Adult immigrant learners are diverse in cultural and educational backgrounds, abilities, needs and wants. Each class is unique. This characteristic of ESL classes asks for a highly flexible design of language program and instructional materials.

#### b Capable of contributing to their learning

Experience-centered and learner-driven approach is believed to be the most effective for adult education because all adults are quite capable of, if not directing, at least contributing to their learning process. The involvement of learners is called for at different levels, ranging from curriculum development, to program design, lesson plans, instructional materials and individual studies.

#### c Need to be motivated

Motivation is seen to be the most important factor in adult second language learning. To motivate students, the language instruction has to be relevant to their lives. Factors such as age, knowledge of the world and learning styles are also good indicators for developing appropriate (and thus motivating) curricula, teaching methods and instructional materials.

### 2 The Content

Language is contextual and learned through use

Knowing a language is using a language. It is the function of language which is important to the L2 learners. That is especially true for immigrants who need to learn the language to 'function' in their new society. It is a skill they use so they can resume their normal lives, to start school, to upgrade themselves and to look for work. (Ho 1993) Adult immigrants must have opportunities to use the language that they learn. They must apply it in their lives and their knowledge of English must make a difference to their needs and wants.

Therefore the language experience has to be as authentic to 'real life' as possible. Conditions for learner engagement must meet the learner's criterion of authenticity – personal and social. "Learners must have a





chance to use the foreign language in sentences formed by themselves with a content of their own, in a well-known context..." (Ericsson 1986:62) Therefore, language has to be taught, learned and practised in a context and the content has to be meaningful to the learners.

Learning a language needs both conscious learning and subconscious acquisition. What is learnt from rules has to be practised in use for the students to take it in. What is learnt from the subsystems has to be integrated into the whole system. To master a language takes lots of repetitive practice in meaningful contexts.

Language is also closely related to culture; immigrants need to learn the language, they also need to learn about the Canadian culture, ways of life and ways of doing things. The content of ESL instruction has to include information about Canada as well.

### **3 The Context**

#### **a Instructor based**

The users of the materials are both the instructors and the students. The instructors are the ones who significantly shape the learning environment for the students so the instructors are regarded as part of the context.

Instructors are the first users of the instructional materials. Like the students, they come from different backgrounds with diverse experiences and they have their own teaching styles and intuition when they teach. It can't be stressed enough that the instructors are the ones who choose to use or not to use as well as how to use the instructional materials. Other factors being equal, instructional materials which are easy to use will attract a wider range of instructors.

#### **b Limited budget**

Because ESL programs are funded on limited budget and most program providers do not receive permanent funding, it is very difficult for them to invest in large assets. Although many providers use computers for teaching, the most popular form of instructional materials are print based. To reproduce print materials in small quantities, photocopying is the most feasible solution. Therefore, it is advisable to produce instructional materials that are photocopy-friendly.

#### **c Spontaneous class**

Each class, however well planned, has a degree of spontaneity. Students will often have questions, they will always like to write and put down notes; the instructional materials need to have room for them to write and add new information as students require.



## DESIGN CRITERIA

Design criteria are developed based on the implications drawn from research findings. The design of the instructional materials consists of two parts. One part is the curriculum: the content. The other part is the interface: the physical and visual organization and presentation of the content. On the one hand, however usable the interface design is, it is powerless unless the curriculum is well designed. On the other hand, however well designed the curriculum is, it cannot be used to its greatest potential without an effective interface design. Very importantly, well designed instructional materials will remain useless unless the instructors and the learners bring them to life.

### *1 Curriculum design*

#### **The content**

Given the diversity of ESL classes, the content has to:

**1 encompass many relevant topics and remain flexible;**

In order to be motivating, the content should:

**2 be about Canadian 'real life' situations in which students find themselves;**

Since the involvement of the students is important, the content should:

**3 encourage their participation and input;**

Since ESL adult immigrants are from diverse cultural backgrounds the content has to:

**4 be culturally sensitive;**

Language has to be learnt gradually, wholistically and repetitively. The content:

**5 should be composed of various levels of skills;**

**6 needs to introduce the subsystems of the language and show how these subsystems work in context;**

**7 should build redundancy but be presented in different contexts.**

### *2 Interface design*

#### **The Physical and the Visual**

There are plenty of instructional materials in the market for ESL; however, as discovered during field work, most instructors put together instructional materials by cutting, pasting and photocopying. It is quite obvious that this cut-paste-copy culture suggests that there is a gap between the available materials and the needs of ESL instruction. Since



most instructors are able to use a combination of various existing materials, it seems that suitable content is available. It is worth noting that all the content rich materials may need to be more thoughtfully organized to assist the instructor; so they don't have to re-invent the wheel by cutting and pasting. The organization of the content, therefore, should be the number one priority for the design of the instructional materials. The interface design has to respond well to the intention of the curriculum and also takes into account the environmental constraints in which the materials are used.

To cover much content and to allow flexibility:

**1 the content can be organized as a modular system.**

Since the content is about 'real life' situations:

**2 the presentation has to resemble Canadian 'real life' materials.**

To encourage students' participation:

**3 the materials have to be arresting and appeal to adults.**

To be culturally sensitive:

**4 the presentation has to avoid strong cultural bias.**

For the learners to learn gradually:

**5 the content can be divided into three levels.**

In order to relate the parts of the language to the whole:

**6 a 'link' has to be developed.**

To build redundancy:

**7 the content has to be recycled in different formats.**

Since the instructor is the first user:

**8 the materials have to be easy to use.**

Given the budget constraints:

**9 the materials have to be photocopy-friendly.**

Since students usually like to add information:

**10 the materials need to provide optional writing space.**



## DESIGN PROPOSAL

The design focuses on usability – interface design. The suggested curriculum is only used as an example to illustrate the design approach. The content, therefore, is not meant to be comprehensive since curriculum design requires the expertise of professional curriculum developers. The designer also acknowledges possible research needs in the domains of how words and images are related to the learning of ESL. It is not within the scope of this paper to cover this aspect. This thesis is a conceptual design proposal illustrated by samples of instructional materials.

### **/ Organization of Content**

The content of the instructional materials is organized as two modular systems: the main modules and the peripheral modules. The main modules contain information which is topic dependent while the peripheral modules contain universal information such as grammar, picture dictionary and vocabulary to support the main modules. This separation is a very important design solution to reduce the complexity of language teaching and learning and increase the flexibility that is required by ESL classes.

#### The Main Modules (see figure 1)

The main modules are topic/social activity based. To illustrate, eight common social activities were chosen. Each topic has three levels. Each level uses a different location. For example, the social activity 'shopping' takes place at a supermarket in level 1, at a department store in level 2 and at a drug store in level 3. There are 24 units in total and they cover a greater terrain to encompass the various combinations of abilities and needs of the students.

Across each level, the language competency requirement is the same so that it allows the students to practise the same levels of skills in different contexts, which is an effective method in language learning.

Between the three levels, the competency requirement increases gradually from level 1 to 3, which means the content covers new information and revises that previously learnt. This arrangement will provide another opportunity for revision and practice.

Each unit has 4 subunits, (see figure 2) which include: introduction to the topic, information about Canadian culture, reading/writing, and listening/speaking. These are information and language skills based on a particular social activity. The content is recycled within the four subunits,





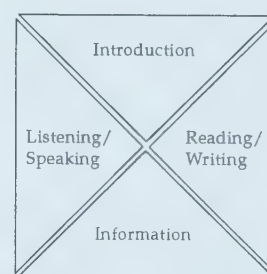
thus providing another opportunity for revision and practice.

In principle, all subunits can be combined with any other subunit and any unit can be combined with any unit. They are all independent and are not meant to be used sequentially. The modular system allows instructors to organize and plan for instruction according to the abilities and needs of the students. For example, if a particular class is stronger in listening/speaking (L/S) than in reading/writing (R/W), they can use the L/S subunit of level 3 and R/W of level 1. Or if a class is interested in learning English related to working, the units about working can be taught first.

**Main Modules**

Topic Skill level	dining	entertainment	financial services	schooling	shopping	socializing	social services	working
1								
2								
3								

**Figure 1**  
Concept of the Main Modules



**Figure 2**  
Concept of the Subunits



**Figure 3**  
Concept of the Peripheral Modules

The Peripheral Modules (see figure 3)

The peripheral modules contain universal information such as grammar, picture dictionary and vocabulary. This information is related to the content of the main modules. There can be as many peripherals as necessary. Each peripheral can have as many pages which cover various activities as needed. These modular peripherals provide additional information to support the main units. For example, if the instructor is using the subunit 'Shopping – level 2 – Information' and would like to have the students learn more about the various types of food, then (s)he can use the peripheral module 'Picture Dictionary – Food' for supplement. (see samples after page 36)



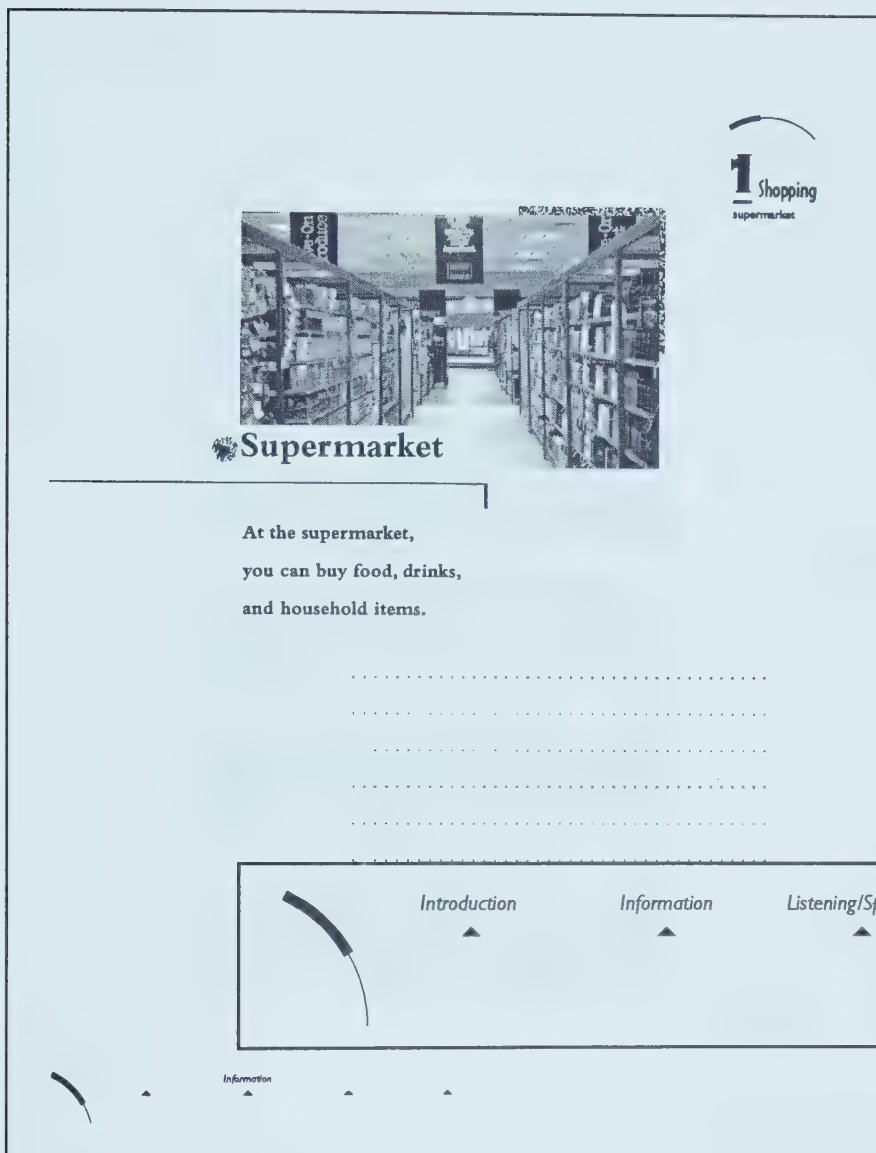
In order for the concept of modular systems to work, the following interface design solutions are offered:

- Physically the main modules are kept in three volumes/binders. A binder contains one level. The eight units are alphabetically indexed.
- Each subunit is a single-sided page, a loose leaf detachable from the binder. Each page is complete in content.
- Since the units are not used sequentially, the pages are not numbered. Therefore, an identification scheme is designed to guide the user to find topics, levels and particular skills. (see figure 4a) Each page is marked by this identification. (see figure 4b) The identification is designed primarily for the instructor. The graphics used for the identification are different from the ones used for the content. The graphics of the identification are less dominant and are located at the margins of the page, away from the prime information to be learnt by the students.
- Each peripheral module has a binder which contains all the individual pages, alphabetically indexed. The system includes a binder for grammar, one for the picture dictionary and one for vocabulary. Since the pages are not meant to be used in a prescribed linear sequence, an identification scheme is designed to help the user locate the items. (see figure 5a)
- Given that the main pages are separated from the peripheral pages, a 'link' between them has been designed. If an instructor is using the page and (s)he likes to give the students a picture dictionary on 'food', then (s)he will be able to obtain it from the picture dictionary binder. On each peripheral page, there is an index indicating links with main pages. (see figure 5b) This will provide the instructor with additional resources.

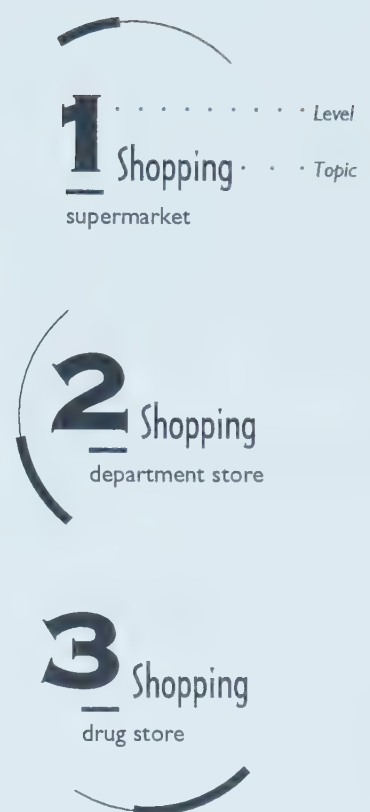
The two separate modular systems have the following advantages:

- 1 *The product is both conceptually and physically modular and by following the identification systems the instructor can easily select and combine appropriate materials to suit an individual class's needs.*
- 2 *The peripheral modules contain universal information that can be applied to many different situations; they don't have to be attached to any main unit. Keeping them separated increases flexibility. The instructor can then choose what to expand depending on the needs of the class.*
- 3 *The link between the peripheral and the main is useful in locating and showing how the subsystems of the language are used in context.*
- 4 *The modular systems are open systems. More levels and topics can be added to the main modules and more information and activities to the peripheral modules. The open systems are very appropriate for the ESL environment as the profiles of the immigrants change readily due to different immigration policies.*





**Figure 4b**  
A Main page



**Figure 4a**  
Identification scheme for the Main Modules





# Food



Food  
pic dictionary

1 Food . . . . . Item  
picture dictionary . . . . . Type of Peripheral  
. . . . . Activity

2 Food  
picture dictionary

Figure 5a  
Identification scheme for the Peripheral Modules

Figure 5b  
A Peripheral page

Index indicating which Main page  
has a link to this Peripheral page



## 2 Visual Presentation

### **a** The use of photographic images

To represent 'real life' situations, photographic images of genuine social situations and imitation of 'real life' reading materials are used. Photographs most closely resemble reality and not only do they provide authenticity but also minimize problems in perceptions that may exist in the culturally diverse student population. All the main pages will have at least one photograph to provide some contextual clues, making the individual page more self-contained.

### **b** 'Inviting' design

The visual design intends to appeal to adult taste, make the information comprehensible, allow room to write, and be photocopy friendly.

To increase comprehensibility and to familiarize the users with the product to reduce their risk of confusion and frustration, information is presented hierarchically by the systematic use of forms, shades and sizes.

- 1 Serif is chosen because studies and experiences have shown that the serif letterforms are preferred for reading by adults. (Tinker 1963)*
- 2 All the primary information is in solid black and less important elements are in tinted black. The different shades enhance visual impact and clarity.*
- 3 To differentiate each type of information:*
  - The title has the largest font, and a dot, a shaded circle and a black line accompanying it.*
  - The primary information has the second largest font and second darkest shades.*
  - Italics are used for numbers and secondary information.*
  - All the answers provided are reversed out of a black bar.*
- 4 To differentiate writing areas:*
  - A solid black bar and a fine black line suggest the users need to give an answer.*
  - A dotted line suggests to the users that they may choose to write. The dotted lines have much lighter shade and don't distract the learners from paying attention to the primary information.*



The text is intentionally broken into meaningful portions so as to make the learning task appear more manageable, thus more inviting.

To allow and encourage the students to write, extra writing space is added between lines of text and elsewhere on the pages. Text or images are more or less centered on each page to allow students to write around them.

To make the materials photocopy-friendly, the following is implemented:

- 1 Letter size page is chosen*
- 2 Each page is complete in content*
- 3 Each page is removable*
- 4 Photographic images are low contrast. They are screened in 150 dpi and output in 65 lpi.*
- 5 There is a high contrast between text and background*

### **3 Samples** (see the following 18 pages)

Using the main unit 'shopping', samples are presented here to demonstrate how the actual product may look. Six peripheral pages are produced to show how different types of information can be presented.





# • At the supermarket









## • Supermarket

At the supermarket  
you can buy food, drinks,  
and household items.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

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.....





## • At the supermarket

*(Check-out counter)*

*Cashier:*           **How are you today?**

*Customer:*       **Fine, thanks.**

*Cashier:*           **It is a very nice day, isn't it?**

*Customer:*       **Yes, very nice.**

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## • Store signs

Enter Exit Customer Express



1



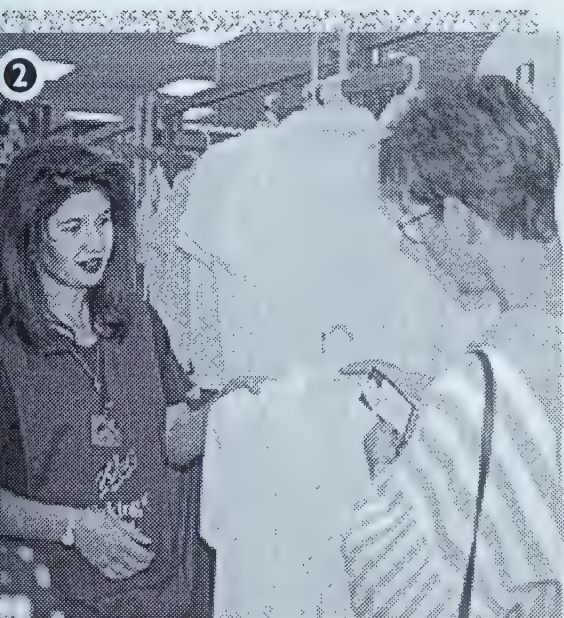
2







# ● At the department store



**2** Shopping  
department store









## Department store

At the department store  
 you can buy food, drinks,  
 household items, clothes, shoes,  
 cosmetics, books, magazines,  
 CDs, sporting goods, furniture and  
 electronic appliances.



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## • At the department store

---

*Salesperson:*     **How are you today?**

*Customer:*        **Fine, thanks.**

*Salesperson:*     **Can I help you?**

*Customer:*        **Yes, I would like to try on this blouse.**

*Salesperson:*     **This is a very nice blouse.**

**What size are you?**

*Customer:*        **Size 10.**

*Salesperson:*     **Here you are.**

*Customer:*        **Thanks.**



.....

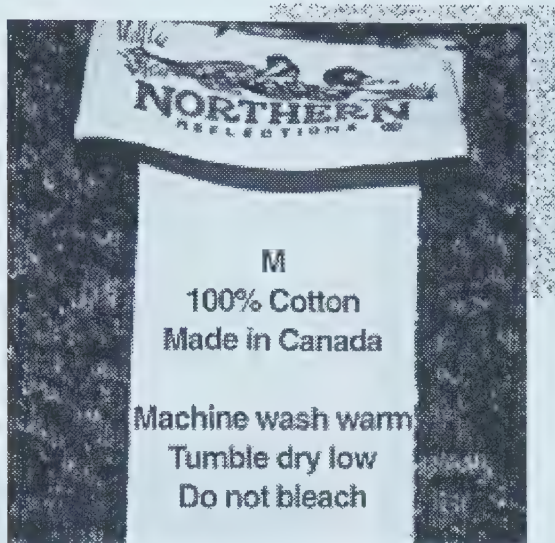
.....

.....

.....



## • A garment label



1 What is the size?

---

2 What is it made of?

---

3 Where was it made?

---

4 Can you wash it?

---

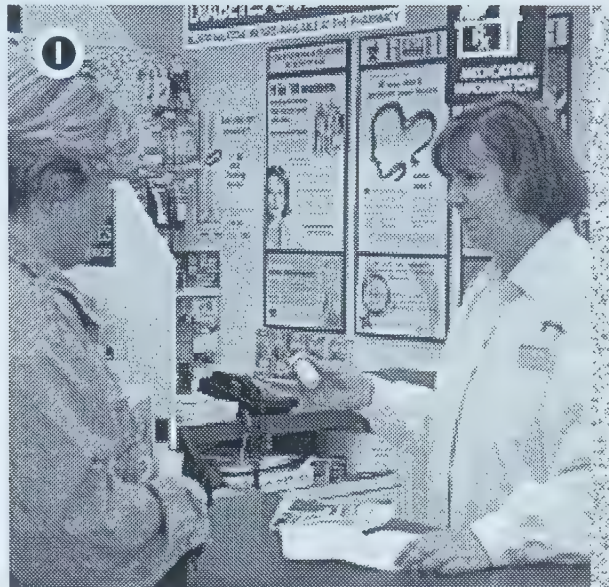
5 Can you dry it?

---





# • At the drug store



**3** Shopping  
drug store







## • Drug store

At the drug store  
you can buy over-the-counter medicines  
and prescription medicines.  
If you need prescription medicines,  
you get them from a pharmacist.

.....

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.....

.....

.....

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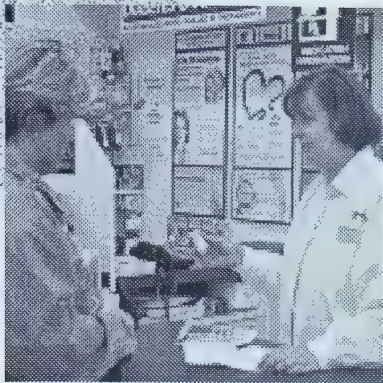
.....

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## • At the drug store

---

*Pharmacist:*     **How are you today?**

*Customer:*       **Not very well.**

*Pharmacist:*     **What is wrong? Can I help you?**

*Customer:*       **I have a sore throat.**

*Pharmacist:*     **Do you need some medicine?**

*Customer:*       **Yes, can you recommend one?**

*Pharmacist:*     **Sure. Why don't you try this?**

*Customer:*       **O.K.**

*Customer:*       **How often should I take it?**

*Pharmacist:*     **Every six hours.**

*Customer:*       **How much is it?**

*Pharmacist:*     **It is \$6.99, please.**

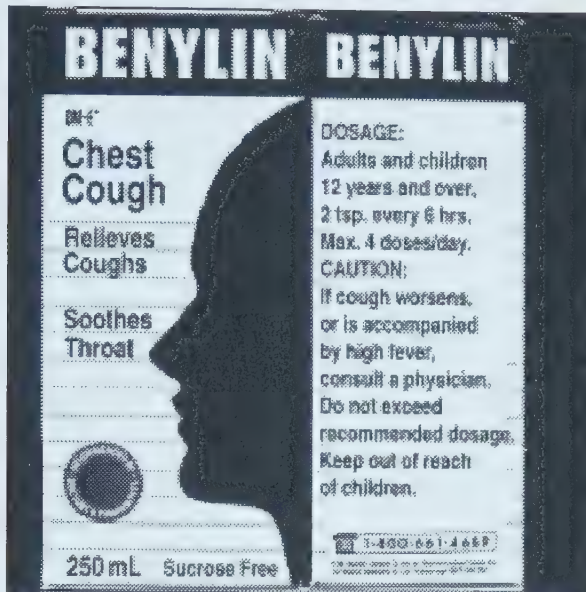
*Customer:*       **O.K. I would like to try this.**

*Pharmacist:*     **Hope you'll feel better.**

*Customer:*       **Thank you. I hope so too.**



## • A medicine label



1 What kind of medicine is this?

---

2 If you have a sore throat, should you take this?

---

3 Can a child under 12 years take this?

---

4 What is the maximum dosage per day?

---

5 When should you consult a physician?

---

6 Where should you keep the medicine?

---





## To Be

	<i>Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Present Perfect</i>	<i>Past Perfect</i>	<i>Future</i>
I	am	was	have been	had been	shall be
You	are	were	have been	had been	will be
He	is	was	has been	had been	will be
She	is	was	has been	had been	will be
It	is	was	has been	had been	will be
We	are	were	have been	had been	shall be
They	are	were	have been	had been	will be
.....					
.....					
.....					
.....					
.....					
.....					



# ● To Be am are is

Present

- 1 I \_\_\_\_\_ sorry.
- 2 You \_\_\_\_\_ late.
- 3 He \_\_\_\_\_ hungry.
- 4 She \_\_\_\_\_ angry.
- 5 It \_\_\_\_\_ pretty.
- 6 We \_\_\_\_\_ fine.
- 7 You \_\_\_\_\_ busy.
- 8 They \_\_\_\_\_ free.

# ● To Be was were

Past

- 1 I \_\_\_\_\_ sick.
- 2 You \_\_\_\_\_ happy.
- 3 He \_\_\_\_\_ sad.
- 4 She \_\_\_\_\_ kind.
- 5 It \_\_\_\_\_ difficult.
- 6 We \_\_\_\_\_ scared.
- 7 You \_\_\_\_\_ early.
- 8 They \_\_\_\_\_ mad.

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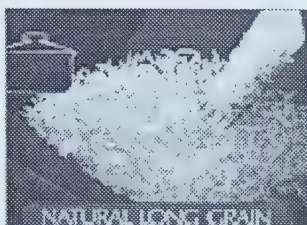
.....

Level 1 • Shopping L/S

Level 2 • Shopping L/S



# • Food



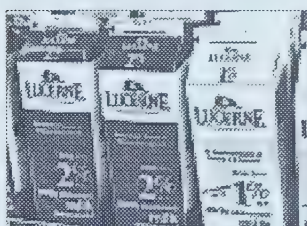
rice



spaghetti



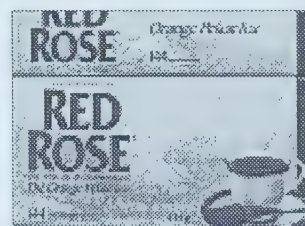
bread



milk



coffee



tea



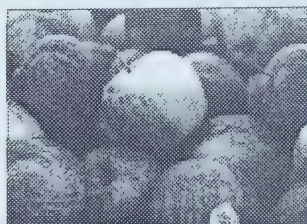
chicken



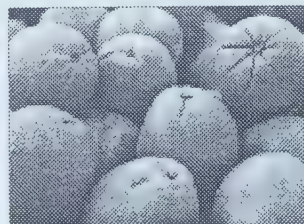
pork



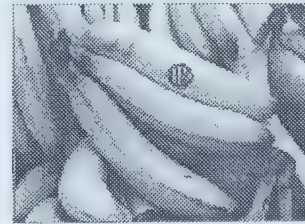
beef



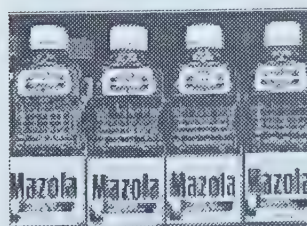
apples



oranges



bananas



oil



sugar



salt

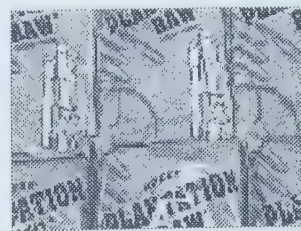
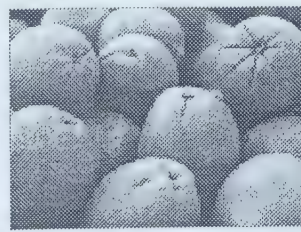
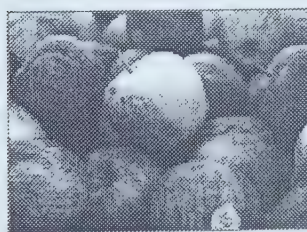
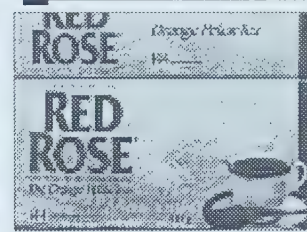
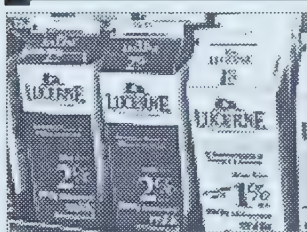
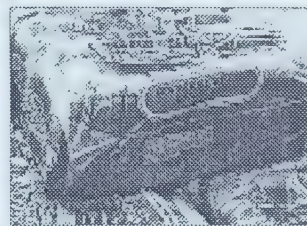
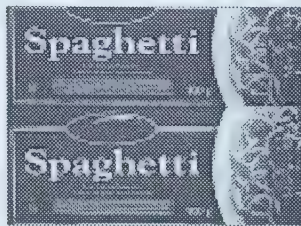
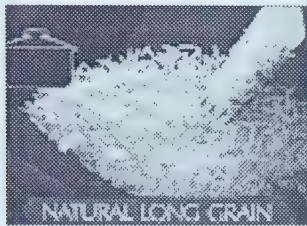




# Food

chicken apples sugar oranges beef tea oil

rice milk pork bananas salt spaghetti bread coffee



Level 1 • Shopping INFO

Level 2 • Shopping R/W





## • Question Words

**When** is Canada Day? (*time*)

**What** is your address? (*things*)

**Where** is your house? (*location*)

**Who** is John? (*a person or people*)

**Why** is it difficult? (*reason*)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Level 2 • Shopping L/S

Level 2 • Shopping R/W

Level 3 • Shopping L/S

Level 3 • Shopping R/W



# • Question Words

What When Where Who Why

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ is John? .....
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ is your house? .....
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ is your name? .....
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ is it difficult? .....
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ is Canada Day? .....
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_ are you? .....
- 7 \_\_\_\_\_ is your birthday? .....
- 8 \_\_\_\_\_ are you so tired? .....
- 9 \_\_\_\_\_ is his address? .....
- 10 \_\_\_\_\_ is late? .....

Level 2 • Shopping L/S

Level 2 • Shopping R/W

Level 3 • Shopping L/S

Level 3 • Shopping R/W



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If we use tools as a metaphor for instructional materials in the ESL field, some useful tools are available but the tool box which contains all the tools is less organized than desired. The cut-paste-copy practice takes up valuable time of the instructor and produces instructional materials that are not always the most usable for teaching and learning. The modular systems proposed in this thesis are designed to keep the instructional materials flexible and to remain attractive, consistent and coherent.

The proposed modular systems are composed of three language levels, eight topics, four language skills and three subsystems of language. The concept of modular systems is not new, we see it used in instructional design, in furniture, in toys and even in custom-made sandwiches. The challenge lies in the realization of the concept. Problems relating to the physical structure, the visual presentation and navigational orientation are identified and solutions are proposed. The proposed design intends to make the instructional materials more accessible and comprehensible.

Like most things in life, a closure signifies another opening. This research ends with a design proposal that opens the door for further research. The proposal needs to be tested with the users, evaluated and refined. A teacher's guide may be developed to assist the teacher because the use of the proposed materials is rather unfamiliar.

The concept of the modular systems could be adapted very well to hypertext environments. An electronic version of the instructional materials can be developed. It can be designed to help instructors find and select the materials. Or it can be designed to become self-taught materials for the students.

Since the modules are open systems, how to keep them open and alive has to be examined. More research on how to expand the modules to include higher language levels can also be implemented.

The designer started this research project by asking "What can a visual communication designer contribute to the development of instructional materials?" Having taken a user centered, content and context driven approach the designer was able to identify some design problems for which she could propose solutions.

This research demonstrates the possibility a designer has for initiating a project in a field outside of design. It stresses the idea of having designers not only reduce problems but find hidden design problems. It demonstrates the potential benefits that communication design can provide in different walks of life. There are many areas for designers to explore and one way to begin is to ask "What does design have to do with it?" and "What could design do for it?"





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## Appendix I

### Summary of Class Observations



Date: Dec 8, 1997 (9 - 11am)

Students: 7

The first hour was the Weekend Story period. The instructor transcribed when the students told their stories. Some students read from a prepared manuscript and some just talked. Most students did not seem very interested when others were telling their stories. I had to tell a story about my weekend too. I tried to use simple sentences.

The second hour was the Short Syllabus Program in which students learnt basic English in all four areas – speaking, listening, reading and writing. Students and the instructor were using IM produced by the Alberta Vocational College. The IM looked like they were printed from a laser printer. The sheets were stapled together to form a package. Each package was for one particular topic. So far the students had received eight packages. Most students kept all the packages in a three ring binder.

That day, they were learning how to ask personal questions. Students had the IM in front of them and most of them had a notebook as well.

The instructor wrote sentences which were similar to those on the IM on the white board. He used four different colours for each sentence. **I noticed there was no particular logic for his use of colours.** Not all students copied what he wrote. If they wrote anything, they wrote either on the IM or on a notebook. The instructor asked questions and most students were able to follow his instructions and answered correctly without referring to the IM.

In the second half of the class, students were asked to interview each other and I had to participate as well. All students but one seemed to enjoy the activity. They did the task using questions from the IM and they had to write the answers down on the IM as well. When I was writing what day I normally go shopping, I had to write within a small rectangular box. **I found the format very restrictive and I thought it would be better if I could write the whole sentence in one line. I thought the format should have allowed me to write a normal English sentence which goes from left to right horizontally in a line.**



Date: Dec 9, 1997 (9 - 11am)  
Students: 7

In the first hour the students learnt to read their own weekend stories which had been typed on a sheet. The instructor read the weekend stories and students repeated after him in chorus. The students were also reading from the sheet. The instructor explained some terms as he went. Most students wrote down the explanations directly on the sheet. Then the instructor asked questions following each story and students took turns to answer. All students had to look at the sheet when they replied. **During break time, I photocopied all the students' sheets and noticed all students had written something in their own languages on the sheets.** One student in particular wrote and drew a lot. **I noticed there was not enough space between sentences for them to write.**

In the second hour, students practised what they had learnt the day before. The instructor wrote the content of the IM on the whiteboard. He was reading and pointing at the whiteboard when he taught. The students were looking at the whiteboard. On the white board, the instructor highlighted certain words by drawing a rectangular outline around them or by underlining them. But the symbols were not used consistently. For example, he would outline the word "I" and "you" but also the word "doesn't" and "on". **I thought if the symbols were used more systematically, it should reinforce what the instructor was teaching. I also thought if the same symbols were used on the IM, that would have helped as well.**

Sometimes when the instructor was teaching a certain sentence structure, he would derail and talk about present and past tense. And he would write wherever there was room on the white board. The students would copy on their notebooks. **I noticed a class, however structured, was rather spontaneous. There were often times when the instructor had to teach something that had not been planned.**

In the last twenty minutes, the students took turns to ask questions on the IM to the person sitting next to them. The other student then replied by reading from what they first had written. The rest were listening to the questions and the answers, and they were also reading from the IM.





Date: Dec 10, 1997 (9 - 11am)

Students: 7

In the first hour, the students had a test. The instructor handed the students a sheet full of questions about the weekend stories. The students read from the stories to get the answers. I noticed for most students there was enough room to write, except for one student whose handwriting was rather big. I was told later, this student had not learnt to read nor write in her own language.

In the second hour, the class continued where they had left off the day before and I did not notice anything particularly different from the previous observations.



## Appendix 2

### Samples of Existing Materials



## CLASSROOM DIALOGUES

### LATE

STUDENT: I'm sorry. I'm late.  
I had to wait for the elevator.

TEACHER: O.K.

or: I went to the washroom.  
I went to see the Student Advisor.

---

STUDENT: May I leave the room?

TEACHER: O.K.

or: May I go to the washroom?  
May I get a drink?

---

STUDENT: Can we have a coffee break?

TEACHER: O.K. 10 minutes.





## KEYS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

1. I don't understand. Could you help me?
2. I'm sorry. I don't understand.
3. Please speak slowly.
4. Please repeat that.
5. What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?
6. How do you pronounce \_\_\_\_\_ ?
7. How do you say \_\_\_\_\_ ?
8. How do you spell \_\_\_\_\_ ?





cookies

Question: Would you please pass the cookies?



grapes

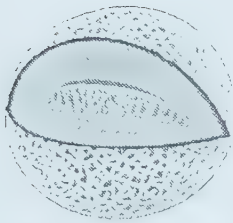
Question: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Question: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



cantaloupe

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



sugar

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**DIALOGUE**

1.      Would you like      (coffee)  
   (some tea)?  
   (a cookie)

Yes, please.

No, thank you.

Not now. Maybe later.

Could I have some juice?

Do you have any juice?

2.      Would you like coffee or tea?

Tea, please.

Coffee, please.

Nothing, thank you.

Could I have some juice?

Do you have any juice?

Thanks, but I've already ordered.

Thanks, but somebody is getting me something.

3.      Cream and Sugar?

Yes, please.

No, thank you.

Just cream.

Sugar, please.

Two spoons of sugar, please.

4.      How do you like your (coffee)?  
   (tea)

Nothing, thank you.

A little cream.

Sugar, please.

Do you have any honey?

5.      Would you like some coffee?

No, thanks. I already have some.

No, thanks. I have some tea.



6. Would you like a cookie?

No, thanks. I already have one.

8. Would you like some tea?

9. Would you like (some more coffee)?  
(another cookie)

10. Could I have (some more tea)?  
(another cookie)

11. Excuse me. I asked for coffee.  
Excuse me. this is not coffee.

Find a partner and practise these conversations.





**BORROWING/RETURNING**

1. A: Could I borrow your book?  
B: Okay.
2. A: Could I borrow your pen?  
B: Sorry. I need it.  
A: Thanks anyway.
3. A: Could I borrow your glasses?  
B: Sorry. I need them.  
A: Thanks anyway.
4. A: Could I borrow a pencil?  
B: Sorry. I don't have one.  
A: Thanks anyway.
5. A: Could I borrow some money?  
B: Sorry. I don't have any.
6. A: Could I borrow a pen?  
B: Sorry. I don't have one. How about a pencil?  
A: Okay. Thanks.
7. A: Could I borrow your car?  
B: Sorry. I don't lend my car to anyone.
8. A: Could I borrow your book?  
B: When will you bring it back?  
A: In 10 minutes.  
B: Okay.
9. A: Could I borrow your pencil?  
B: When will you give it back?  
A: Tomorrow.  
B: I need it this afternoon.  
A: Okay. I'll give it back after lunch.  
B: Fine. Here you are.  
A: Thanks.
10. A: Could I borrow a pen until tomorrow?  
B: Sure.



11.   A:     Could I borrow \$5 until tomorrow?  
      B:     Sure, but Monday's soon enough.  
      C:     Okay. Thanks very much.

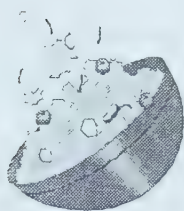
**Returning Something - Examples**

1.    A:     Here's your pen. Thanks.  
      B:     You're welcome.
2.    A:     I'm finished with the cassette. Thank you.  
      B:     That's fine. Could you put it in the drawer?
3.    A:     Thank you for the tablecloths.  
      B:     You're welcome.
4.    A:     Here's your book. Thanks.  
      B:     That's not my book.  
      A:     Oh, sorry!
5.    A:     Here's you pencil.  
      B:     It's broken.  
      A:     Oh, I'm sorry. I'll sharpen it.



1. Please pass the cake.  
a serviette.  
the milk.
2. Can I have a/an \_\_\_\_\_ please?

bowl



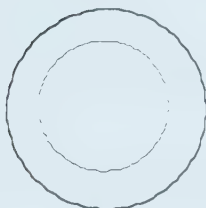
cup



knife



plate



fork



spoon



napkin/serviette



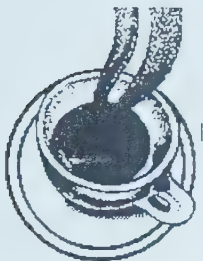
kleenex



3. **Compliment** someone on their food.
- A: Mmm! This cake is delicious! What's in it?
- B: Let me think ... eggs, sugar, flour, raisins.
- A: It's excellent!
- B: I'm glad you like it.
1. great  
very good



## WOULD YOU PLEASE



cup of coffee

Would you please pass the \_\_\_\_\_ ?

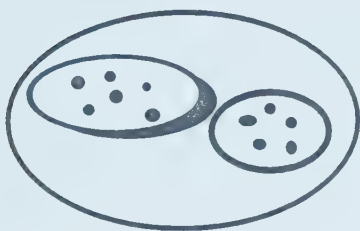


plate of cookies

Would \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ?



glass of water

Would \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ?



bowl of soup

Would \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ?



bottle of pop

Would \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ?





## POLITE EXPRESSIONS

Please

You are welcome

Excuse me

No problem

God bless you

I'm sorry

Thank you

Do you need help

Thank you so much

Are you O.K.?



---

### Compliments

You look great

Your cake is excellent

What a pretty dress





---

**POLITE EXPRESSIONS**

Write the polite expression you would use.

1. A. Burrp  
A. Excuse me
2. A. Burrp  
A. \_\_\_\_\_
3. A. Aachoo  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
A. Thank you
4. A. Here's your present.  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
A. \_\_\_\_\_
5. A. Thanks for your help.  
B. \_\_\_\_\_
6. A. My child is sick.  
B. \_\_\_\_\_
7. A. Ow - w -w. You stepped on my foot.  
B. \_\_\_\_\_
8. An old man falls on the street.  
A. \_\_\_\_\_  

or

  
A. \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix 3

### Samples of Pretest Materials



# Classroom Dialogues

---

STUDENT:

TEACHER:

1    I'm sorry. I'm late. I had to wait for the elevator.

I went to the washroom.

O.K.

I went to see the Student Advisor.

.....

2    May I leave the room?

go to the washroom?

O.K.

get a drink?

.....

3    Can we have a coffee break?

O.K. 10 minutes.

Notes	Vocabulary





# Classroom Dialogues - Keys for learning English

---

## STUDENT:

1 I don't understand. Could you help me?

I'm sorry. I don't understand.

.....

2 Please speak slowly.

repeat that.

.....

3 What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?

.....

4 How do you pronounce \_\_\_\_\_?

say \_\_\_\_\_?

spell \_\_\_\_\_?

Notes	Vocabulary



# Asking

---

Would you please pass the ( cookies )?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ ( turkey )

2 \_\_\_\_\_ ( grapes )

3 \_\_\_\_\_ ( potato chips )

4 \_\_\_\_\_ ( ice-cream )



# Dialogues

## PERSON A

1     Would you like    coffee?  
                                 some tea?  
                                 a cookie?

## PERSON B

Yes, please

No, thank you.

Not now. Maybe later.

Could I have some juice?

Do you have any juice?

2     Would you like coffee or tea?

Tea, please

Coffee, please

Nothing, thank you.

Could I have some juice?

Do you have any juice?

Thanks, but I've already ordered.

Thanks, but somebody is getting me something.

3     Cream and Sugar?

Yes, please.

No, thank you.

Just cream.

Sugar, please.

Two spoons of sugar, please

Notes

Vocabulary



## Dialogues

PERSON A

**PERSON B**

4 How do you like your coffee?

A little cream.

Sugar, please.

Nothing, thank you.

Do you have any honey?

5 Would you like some coffee?

No, thanks. I already have some.

No, thanks. I have some tea.

6 Would you like a cookie?

No, thanks. I already have one.

Would you like some tea?

Would you like some more coffee?

another cookie?

Could I have some more tea?

another cookie?

Excuse me. I asked for coffee.

This is not coffee.

## Notes

## Vocabulary





# Dialogues - Borrowing

---

## PERSON A

## PERSON B

1 Could I borrow your book?

Okay

2 Could I borrow your pen?

Sorry, I need it.

> Thanks anyway.

3 Could I borrow your glasses?

Sorry, I need them.

> Thanks anyway.

4 Could I borrow a pencil?

Sorry. I don't have one.

> Thanks anyway.

5 Could I borrow some money?

Sorry, I don't have any.

6 Could I borrow a pen?

Sorry. I don't have one. How about a pencil?

> Okay. Thanks.

7 Could I borrow your car?

Sorry. I don't lend my car to anyone.

8 Could I borrow your book?

When will you bring it back?

> In 10 minutes.

> Okay.

9 Could I borrow your pencil?

When will you give it back?

> Tomorrow

> I need it this afternoon.

> Okay. I'll give it back after lunch.

> Fine. Here you are.

> Thanks



## Dialogues - Borrowing

---

PERSON A

PERSON B

10 Could I borrow a pen until tomorrow? Sure.

.....

11 Could I borrow \$5 until tomorrow? Sure, but Monday's soon enough.  
> Okay. Thanks very much.

## Dialogues - Returning

---

1 Here's your pen. Thanks You're welcome.

.....

2 I'm finished with the cassette. That's fine. Could you put it in the drawer?  
> Thank you.

.....

3 Thank you for the tablecloths. You're welcome.

.....

4 Here's your book. Thanks That's not my book.  
> Oh, sorry.

.....

5 Here's your pencil. It's broken.  
> Oh, I'm sorry. I'll sharpen it.

Notes

Vocabulary



# Asking

---

- 1    Please pass the cake.  
   a serviette.  
   the milk.

- 2    Can I have a \_\_\_\_\_ please ?

**bowl**

**cup**

**knife**

**plate**

**fork**

**spoon**

**napkin/serviette**

**kleenex**

## Dialogue - Compliment

---

**PERSON A**

**PERSON B**

- 1    Mmm! This cake is delicious! What's in it?    Let me think...egg, sugar, flour, raisins.

>It's excellent! (great / good)

>I'm glad you like it

---

Notes

---

Vocabulary



## Asking - Would you please

---

- 1 Would you please pass the \_\_\_\_\_ (cup of coffee)
- 2 Would \_\_\_\_\_ (plate of cookies)
- 3 Would \_\_\_\_\_ (glass of water)
- 4 Would \_\_\_\_\_ (bowl of soup)
- 5 Would \_\_\_\_\_ (bottle of pop)





# Polite Expressions

---

Please

You are welcome

You look great

Excuse me

No problem

Your cake is excellent

God Bless you

I'm sorry

What a pretty dress

Thank you

Do you need help?

Thank you very much

Are you O.K.?

---

## PERSON A

Write the polite expression you would use:

1 Burrp

---

2 Burrp

---

3 Aaachoo

---

> Thank you

4 Here's your present

---

5 Thanks for your help

---

6 My child is sick.

---

7 Ow - w - w. You stepped on my foot.

---

8 (An old man falls on the street).

---



## **Appendix 4**

### Summary of Pretest Observations



Date: Dec 15, 1997

Students: 7

The first hour was to be dedicated to weekend stories. But the instructor felt it was time for the students to learn the future tense since they had enough practice on the past. So instead of telling a past weekend story, the teacher asked the students what they were going to do in the coming weekend. The instructor had written many sentences in future tense on the white board before all the students arrived. All the students copied the sentences from the white board. **It occurred to me that they had to copy the sentences because there was no IM provided.** The instructor pointed to the phrases he was teaching. It was a hard lesson because the students were learning something new and different from what they had been doing. Most students made a lot of mistakes and found it difficult to answer the instructor's questions. **I wondered how IM might have been able to help.** But I also thought, given a few more practices, the students would catch up.

The second hour was very exciting to me because I got to see how my design would be used. The instructor explained to the class that they would be using what I had designed for that lesson, and there was some confusion in the beginning. The instructor liked the space designated for writing and he told students they could use the space to take notes. However, no one student wrote anything on the space provided on the IM; some kept on writing on their own notebooks. Then when the instructor asked the students to write three sentences, he specifically asked them to write in the space on the IM; all students had to do it without any choice. **This shows how an instructor can affect the learning process of the students. It implied that when designing the IM, it is important to keep in mind that the instructor is the main user. If the instructor likes to use them then he will make the class use them.** After the instructor explained everything on the whiteboard, he turned to the IM for teaching. He didn't ask the class to turn to "page 1" but showed the page to the class instead. **I thought this was very strange, then I realized the page number on my design was kind of hidden, not easy to see.** Instead of teaching the underlined phrases which I thought were important, the instructor spent most of the class time discussing the phrase "had to". **It struck me again as how the instructor had full control of how to use the IM. The way he interpreted them, the way he wanted to use them was totally up to him. What I had designed was quite irrelevant to what the instructor was teaching, thus what the students were learning. Collaboration between the instructors, curriculum developer and designers is very important if successful IM are to be produced.**

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Date: Dec 16, 1997

Students: 7

The class was dedicated to reading from the story sheets as they did in previous classes. There was no special observation I made.

In the second hour, the class used the IM I had designed. The instructor specifically asked the students to write in the space again, and **I wondered whether he would actually ask the students to do this if I was not sitting in the class.** I asked the instructor after class if he would ask the students to write so much on the IM if the space was not provided. His answer was no. He considered the space a good idea and that's why he asked the students to write on it. He also liked the way sentences were grouped together because he thought this would make the task seem easier. **I thought that maybe if the intention of the design was well communicated to the instructors, they may like using the materials. Or if they were involved in the development of the IM, they definitely would like using them. Given that the instructor could use the IM in so many different ways, a design that allows self-organization will be very important.**

Date: Dec 17, 1997

Students 7

The class had a test in the first hour and I did not notice anything different from the previous observations. During the test, I looked at the students' notebooks once again to see if I could discover anything new. I concluded that most students' organization skills were fairly low. **All the IM they received were bits and pieces of cut and pasted materials and this did not help. I wonder, since language is such a complex system, how the information presented to them would affect the way they learn.**

In the second hour, the instructor reviewed page 2 in full detail. The students kept on writing on their notebooks unless the instructor asked them to write on the IM. One of the students said to me he didn't like copying from the whiteboard because he could not write fast enough and couldn't copy very well either. **I was trying to ask the students some questions about the design but all of them found the questions or the English too difficult to understand.**





## **Appendix 5**

### Interview with an Insider



R: In terms of educational background, what kind of profile do the ESL students have?

◀ R : Rosan Chow (The interviewer)

◀ L : Laura Ho (The interviewee)

L: The students in the LINC programs? There is a whole range of backgrounds. You have the classic phrase “they have never been to school”, so you will meet refugees, their numbers are declining due to the change of immigration policy. Canada is actually receiving fewer of these people. You do see some Latin American people in this situation, some Turkish people, coming from Northern Iraq. But for the most part, we are receiving quite educated people. **You have a whole range of people who have zero education to people who have post graduate diplomas.**

R: For the particular class I sat in, the majority of them have rather low education background.

L: When I was doing my research I found that actually the people with fewer problems adapting to life in Canada are the ones who had 10 to 12 years of education.

R: How are they different from the average Canadian adult students returning to school to finish a High School Diploma?

L: The beginners? Oh, they are quite different. For beginners, **first of all they are not familiar with the language used in Canada and, as well, the culture. Often the culture is a bigger barrier than the language. Cultural barriers sometimes are what contribute to the difficulties in learning the language. So for example if you come with a learning style and learning style is an aspect of culture,** if you come from a learning style which is used to memorizing.

R: Like my culture.

L: That's right, like your culture. When you are used to memorizing and translating all the time, you know, this means this, this means this, and you stick to that, in such a tight way and you never actually get to use the language but only translating, that really impairs how quickly you can learn the language. And that is a barrier as well. **Visual items are a problem with beginners.** I will give you an example of someone, this is a literacy student. I was trying to teach her the alphabet by matching the first letter of the word with some pictures.

R: Like A for Apple

L: A for Apple, exactly, so she could not figure out what was supposed to go with B, because what I saw was a banana, but what she saw was a moon. So **abstraction is a big problem, the way you render things is a big problem for a lot of newcomers.**

R: Right.

L: I think the other issue is how **people do not see themselves reflected in a lot of materials, and they don't see their experi-**



ences reflected often. Things from clip-art that people get, it's office situation, managers, white woman talking to white man. **The ESL beginners, I will say their greatest problems come from their mismatch between their cultures and the Canadian culture and expectations.**

R: You have actually answered my next question but since I have it ready I will ask you anyway. What are the difficulties they face when they are learning the language?

L: **Learning style, I guess finding a place where they can fit and insert themselves.** It is one thing to go to the class to learn a language but it is not going to make any sense to you if you are not going to have a chance to use what you learn. **But how do you actually meet Canadians and get to talk to them? This is a big barrier for many people.** The language is always an abstraction, and in fact it is quite possible to live in Canada and seldom use English.

R: Ah right, like my parents and relatives.

L: I am sure you have a lot of experience. For those people it is not a problem, they can live quite a comfortable lifestyle, so why is English such a big deal? **Why is it important for people to learn English? For social participation, that means you should be able to connect in a cultural way, in a linguistic way, with the community, you need to have a motivation, and a sense of purpose in doing it.**

You have to feel you have a connection with those people. But if you have never had the connection and you have no desire to meet with those people or connect with those people, then you are not going to have a motivation to learn the language.

R: I am going to turn to my topic now, for the LINC classes, what kind of instructional materials do the instructors use?

L: **They use a lot of workbooks, that are from commercial publishers.**

R: Do they put them together?

L: **The operation mode I think is photocopy.** They tend to have a lot of different materials from a lot of different books because you can never find one book that is going to meet precisely every class. It is very hard to find a book. You can teach the same class, same level, two terms in a row but you can have completely different needs in the group. Why? **Because you can have students from different countries, they can have different educational backgrounds, different goals for themselves, can have a number of different learning styles... so for each class, you have to tailor to the needs of the class.** A particular textbook is not going to meet the needs of different groups. Or you have to do a lot of tailoring of the materials.



R: So when the instructors are putting together instructional materials for a particular class, what kind of criteria do they use, the three most important ones?

L: I guess **number one they will be looking for the relevance to the experiences of the students** and they would probably look at the skills that correspond to the activities they are teaching: are they teaching reading skills? are they teaching speaking skills? are they teaching listening skills? **they will be looking at combining the relevance of the activities and the particular skills they want to focus on.** And they will also be looking for something that can animate the group. You want to animate the group in some way and somehow make them connect, so it has to be something that involves the students. **So they want activities that are involving.** It's not something that is flat, where you write the questions and students give the answers. That was the kind of thing we saw a lot in the sixties and seventies with the kind of work that you filled in the blanks. They still have some of those things, but now they tend to be discussions. They are more involved with the discussion and building on what takes place in the activities. They have more interactivity.

R: One of the things I did notice is students receiving bits and pieces of instructional materials and I wonder how this affects their learning.

L: I think it is a big problem. I have a program downtown, students complain to us because each class they have a different teacher, so Monday morning they have one teacher, Monday afternoon they will have another teacher, Tuesday morning they have a different teacher, because it's all taught by volunteers, so it is a big problem. Students do complain, **the problem is probably there is not enough review, for materials, we don't go back enough to them to review and build on those.** **That really is the responsibility of the teachers when you are photocopying: to make sure that continuity has to go by your own planning and I am not sure how consistently it has been done.**

R: I am actually concerned about quality control.

L: That is actually a concern for me too.

R: I noticed the materials, in terms of content, show continuity, but in terms of presentation, I find it very hard to follow myself.

L: Yeah, it is very frustrating, you get large print, you get small print, you get American English, you get British English and Canadian English, you know, one minute you are working on one thing, it is very difficult to follow, but I think the problem is not having enough review, **it would be done more effectively even if we use the same materials and go**





**back to them several times and build on them instead of constantly introducing new things.**

R: So the final questions related to the instructional materials: what are the most important criteria for developing instructional materials in terms of content and presentation? You have touched on them a bit already but I just want to wrap it up.

L: O.K. I will give you a couple of things about that. **One, the materials have to be relevant to the students' lives but , I add a "but" here, they also have to be motivating, that means students have to be able to see how they connect.** I will tell you a story about that, I had a student who was very unmotivated, and kept on going to classes and really not making any progress at all, and we had a little conversation with her; counselling intervention but she was just not motivated, we had complaints from the teacher about her; we didn't know what to do to get her motivated, one day I tried an activity which should have been at a higher level, but the language was not that difficult, they have been through this stuff so often. She just turned around and she was so interested, because she had been in the same level for so long, **she was really looking for an opportunity to learn something which will make a difference to her, even though she had not mastered what she was working on. She needed to be moving on, so mastery is not always the criteria that we need to work at, nor is the particular language level. The only criteria we have to be looking at is that the IM have to connect to the students, and put them into places where they can see themselves going.** Because if we don't put them into places where they see themselves going, they are going to get turned off and they don't want to be going to the ESL classes any more. We have a tremendous population in Canada who have given up on learning English, they have consigned themselves to kitchens, cleaning tasks, those kinds of people. **They have given up because learning English has not made a difference to them.**

R: It's interesting. You keep on jumping ahead of my questions. My second question is about motivation. How do you motivate students through the instructional materials?

L: You have to give them something that they think is going to make a difference to them. They have to be able to see themselves moving into a direction, and that means **materials have to connect them with the situations to meet with people and the community.** It is not enough. I... have you been reading any post modern literature? One thing it talked about in post modern literature is quite applicable to the situation in ESL classes. In ESL classes, you have no real contact with the real world, you have the teacher; you have the students and you have the



walls, you have copied materials, photocopied materials, not even real materials. What we are doing is we are producing a world to people not through their own experiences, but through the experiences of the teachers. I think it is very sad. They come to Canada to have their own experience, not to have the world interpreted to them. I think this is a big problem, the materials really need to help people to reach out and become part of the community. Ideally that's what I think programs should do.

R: Since we are touching on the topic of motivation, and I talked with an instructor who thinks making it fun is an important element, how do you look at the fun part?

L: Well, **what is fun for one person may not be fun for others, and I question what is fun?** What does that mean? Sometimes we can just be like Sesame Street and Sesame Street can be instructive, and we can think of tiny little things to amuse people. But I think actually **learning is hard work, it needs all the memorization of all the English past tense forms, participles and all sorts of stuff, vocabularies, you are not going to get it just by having fun.** You have to memorize a lot of things to gain mastery of a language. Yes the lessons have to be motivating but I don't necessarily say 'fun'.

R: I came across in reading the ESL literature, you can bring life to your ESL class by using relics, magazine, newspaper, wall charts, etc, what do you think about those teaching aids?

L: There are actually books.

R: *The ESL Toolbox.*

L: Hum... Have you come across a book called "Canadian Newspaper Stories" or something like that. I think that book actually works really well. That book does. I think **using the copies of magazine articles is not very controlled.** So students often have problems with too many new words, on one hand, it is good, because it keeps them in touch with current ideas which they want to have, but if they have to look up every second word in a dictionary then it is a problem. Because they are not able to read it. Then they are not reading it, they depend on the teacher to tell them. So they are learning reading skills and it is not building independence. So it is kind of a mixed thing. I use a lot of that sort of thing but I use the newspaper stories, I often have to rewrite the story, selecting a section and simplifying it. I do that usually on the board. I had students complaining to me in a school which ordered a set of newspapers, these are students who don't read or write very much English at all and you are giving them newspapers everyday, and they are supposed to be reading the newspaper. **It has to be done in a thoughtful and also directed way.**

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R: Since we mentioned *The ESL Toolbox*, what do you think about it?

L: I have a copy at my program and it gets used very little.

R: How come?

L: Number one, **it's way too big and way too cumbersome**. People just won't take it down from the shelf because every time you do, it just about breaks your arm when you lift it up. The games, we have tried the games in there, most of the games they played once or twice and they found it kind of irrelevant. Once again they don't really... They are written ...I think the number one criterion is you have to be at a certain level, but **the relevance of the activities does not really come through to me, it is not transparent how this learning is going to connect me to anything that I need to know about, it is kind of flat**. That's what I thought of it.

R: What's the possibility of these students using computer based instructional materials?

L: **It's quite possible; the biggest barrier is cost**. These classes don't tend to be really well funded, so there is no permanence, and they are funded on a program by program basis and you never know from one year to the next. It makes it very hard to do any long term planning and it is difficult to purchase capital items like lots of computers. I think it would be interesting and a lot of people would be interested in learning that way, but cost is a big problem.

















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